

"The Trouble at Tres Pinõs".by J-Allan Dunn
L-De Bra-Chas.Tenney Jackson-Thomson Burtis

Short Stories

Twice A Month

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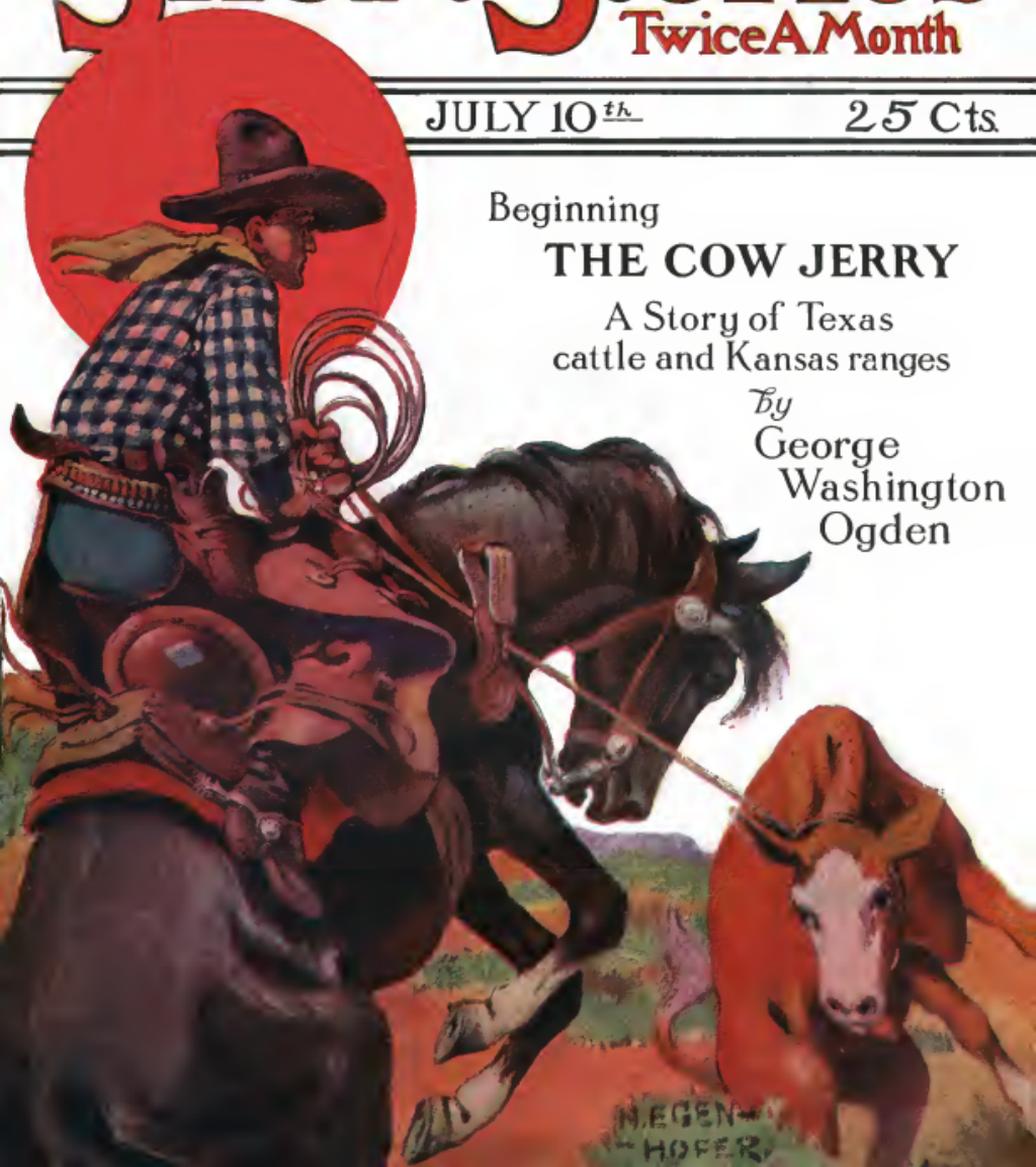
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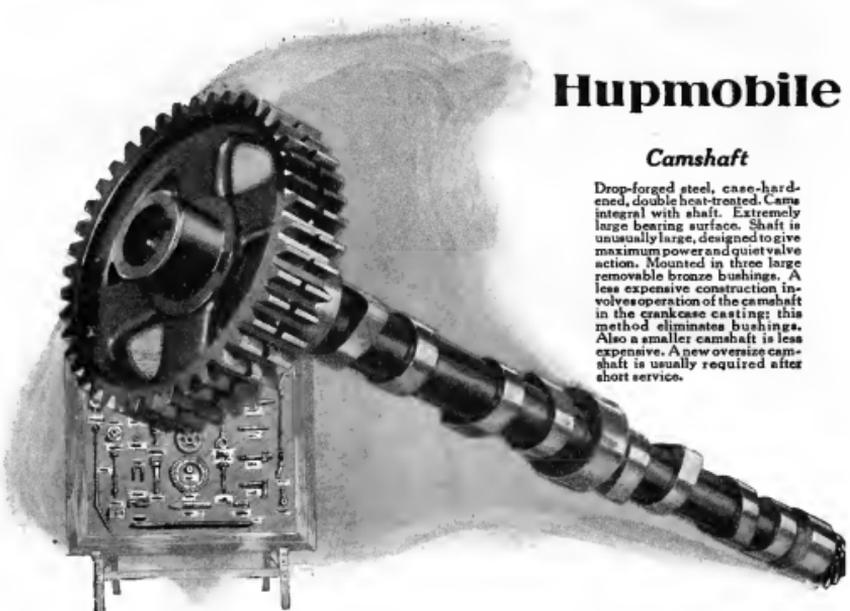
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Short Stories



Vol. CVIII., No. 1

Whole No. 446

HARRY E. MAULE
EDITORD. McILWRAITH
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

SAVE OR INVEST?

SUPPOSE you are a person of moderate means, and suppose you are still young enough, which means, I suppose, any age up to ninety, to have the chief goal of your life still before you. Are you scrimping to save money for that goal, or are you trying to put your little margin to work for you? Henry Ford in his autobiography sets the problem very neatly when he says:

"It is possible even to overemphasize the saving habit. It is proper and desirable that everyone have a margin. . . . But it can be overdone. . . . Most men who are laboriously saving a few dollars would be better to invest—first in themselves, and then in some useful work. . . . Young men ought to invest in themselves to increase creative value. After they have taken themselves to the peak of usefulness, then will be time enough to think of laying aside, as a fixed policy, a certain substantial share of income."

In other words, money as such is not wealth, and money which is idle or hoarded

is merely a useless symbol. Plain enough, but more important and more radical still is the advice to young men first to invest in *themselves*. Did you ever think of your education—that is your education in its broader aspects—

as an investment in yourself? Yet that is just what it is, because any training that is training will increase your value to the community, your productiveness. Thus production means ideas, broadening experience, things, *wealth*; and you are, by putting your money into yourself, making an investment that will pay rich dividends later on.

Of course there is no space here to lay down individual rules. Each one must apply the principle for himself, but the point is clear that one can create the maximum amount of wealth by bringing his own capacity, mental and physical, to its highest point by study, training, thoughtful analysis, before he begins what the brokers call profit taking.

THE EDITOR.



CONTENTS



COVER DESIGN	N. EGGENHOFER	
THE TROUBLE AT TRES PIÑOS	J. ALLAN DUNN	3
THE FADEOUT	CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON	43
THE COW JERRY (Part 1)	GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN	52
THE HAND AT THE WINDOW	L. DE BRA	82
MOONLIGHT AND MOONSHINE	THOMSON BURTIS	88
UNCLE BILLY WATSON'S JOB	OWEN CLARK TRELEAVEN	104
SHOVIN' ON (Verse)	CLEM YORE	112
THE CAMP OF THE SNAKE	HAROLD LAMB	113
BUSH LEAGUE STRATEGY	H. M. SUTHERLAND	141
DISAPPEARING DALRYMPLE	HAMILTON CRAIGIE	150
GRIST	MURRAY LEINSTER	154
THE MASQUE OF TRAGEDY	ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD	163
THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE		174

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Short Stories

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THE TROUBLE AT TRES PIÑOS

A Complete Novel

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Men of the Mesa," "Mesquite," "The Lightning Kid," etc.

THERE WAS REALLY TROUBLE AT TRES PIÑOS AND SLIM MARVIN RODE RIGHT INTO IT. BUT SLIM WAS NOT THE SORT TO MIND TROUBLE IN A GOOD CAUSE. AND HE GOT IT—NIGHT RAIDERS, CATTLE RUSTLERS, BAD MEN, AND ALL THEIR ACCOMPANYING VILLAINIES

SLIM MARVIN rode blithely toward Caroca, the county seat, in search of a job. The last one had been spoiled for him by the advent of a new owner who cared little for cattle and less for the West, being intent only upon getting back the money he had advanced on a mortgage, the interest of which had been only intermittently paid by a man who was a good cattleman, but a better spender.

There had been words between Slim and the mortgagor, who had seemed to entertain the curious idea that because he had not reaped the financial profit he anticipated, his ranch hands should be willing to accept a loss in the wages due them.

The memory of what he had told the new owner helped to keep Slim in a good humor. His phrasing had been brief and crisp and eminently to the point. It had got under the thick hide of the man who had paid him in full and dispensed with his services after Slim had told him that he would rather sift cinders in hell than work for a *hombre* whose nature would contaminate a coyote—or words to that effect.

So, with his best horse and saddle under him, his second string left with a friend at

a neighboring ranch, a nice pay-check in his pocket; Slim had no cares. He was a good cowman—none better—and he had small fears of not landing a job—as soon as his money gave out. Meantime he meant to sleep some, eat sweetened pies and cake, gamble, treat any friends he might make or find at Caroca, and generally relax after long weeks of work.

He had tried out his own county without finding an opening that suited him, and now he was adventuring into comparatively new fields. Only once before had he been to Caroca and he associated that visit with a measure of ill luck that he hoped ardently to redeem on this occasion. He had got into a poker game with certain individuals who made a profession of that pastime and had convinced Slim, for the time being, that he was merely an amateur. He remembered the features of those individuals, and he burned to once more sit with them at a table where the chips clicked and the limit was not mentioned.

Slim's name had grown up with him, bestowed upon him the first day he appeared, a stripling of seventeen, astride a half-broken broomtail mustang, at the fall roundup. That was ten years back, and

Slim had developed in many ways. Slim was scarcely the *sobriquet* for him now, but he was lean and his waistline was still ten inches less than that of his chest. As he sat in the saddle his shoulders seemed ultra broad, and when the wind flattened the cloth of his shirt against his shoulders it disclosed flat masses of muscle that could work like ropes in well-oiled sheaves.



Good to look at, was Marvin. No girl had ever called him handsome, but he suggested the sun and the wind, virility and friendliness, with eyes that could chill and a jaw that could jut upon occasion into a welded firmness and insistency that caused his fellow riders to speak of Slim as one who did to take along. Girls usually looked at him twice at least.

Slim's singing intentions were better than his execution. His voice was better in speech than song, but the day was fine and the wind blew free, the mesas and the sharper peaks of the Esquelitos Mountains stood out sharply defined beyond the plain down which he rode on his way to Caroca. A song bird was warbling as sweetly as any mocking bird in his own home state below the Dixie Line; his bay mount, with the three white stockings and the blaze down its roman nose, was going strong on springy pasterns; the mesquite waved lacyly and Slim was constrained to express himself in sentiment—something he steadfastly abjured in everyday affairs. This was vicarious. Slim was no poet.

Her name it was Cherokee Mary,
She was sweet as a Cherokee rose;
Though her manners were often contrary
She was light as an elf on her toes.
She could dance like a zephyr-blown thistle
She could smile like the witch that she was;
And when she got mad she could bristle
And cuss like a good one, because

Although she was cute as a fairy
The cutest gal ever I saw,
Yet noboddy wedded with Mary
For—she was a Cherokee squaw!

"And I'm no squawman, Pete," he confided to the bay. "What's mo', I ain't pinin' to hitch up to any woman, brown, red or white. Me, I think too much of mah libutty, hawss. If I was married

now I'd have had to take what that son of a gun offered me back to the ranch, 'stead of tellin' him to his face where he-all headed in. An' you an' me wouldn't be lopin' along this fine mawnin' with one hundred an' eighty bucks in our pockets, hawss, lookin' forward to apple pie that ain't made out of dried apples. Fo' you git one, you sweet-toothed *caballo*, sure's we hit Caroca. Reckon this is Owl Canyon, an' we're half way there."

Owl Canyon thrust itself out of the plain in unusual fashion, two walls of rock honeycombed with caves, so that the weathered fronts resembled sponges, the dirt sloping back from their crests to common level again and an irregular passage between the walls. Midway, a spring of water gushed, slightly warm, slightly sulphurous, but refreshing at that stage of a ride made dusty with alkali, and sufficient to cause a little oasis of grass and low trees.

Usually there were cattle there, and sometimes tracks showed where deer came down from the distant hills to drink the waters that instinct told them was good for them. But it was close to noon and all four-footed things, save those pressed into the service of man, were enjoying what shade and coolness they might find.

Slim, on his seventh stanza, which told of the horrors of an Indian mother-in-law, checked song and horse simultaneously as he rode out of a bay in the cliff, following the scanty strip of shade; and saw the tableau staged on the turf near the spring. Two ponies grazed in the background. Their riders had apparently dismounted for a drink. One was a man, not as tall as Slim, but much heavier, clad in a shirt with an aggravated pattern of plaid generally affected by the film variety of cowboy rather than by the genuine variety. He was wearing worn leather chaparejos on bowed legs, leather gauntlets, and, over all, a cartridge belt that holstered an ivory-handled gun. His Stetson hat lay on the grass. Slim took a dislike to him at first sight of the swarthy face, almost as dark as a Mexican's, and the sneeringly triumphant features, to say nothing of his action, which aroused in Slim a consuming desire to make a third in the tableau—which he did.

The man had seized by the wrist a girl, slender in riding togs of khaki breeches, brown boots, linen shirt of russet brown with a tie of bright scarlet. There seemed to have been some sort of a previous scuffle, for her dark hair was disarranged and

long strands of it hung to her waist. She was sunbrowned, but color flamed high in her cheeks and Slim caught the flash of spirit in her eyes as he off-saddled and leaped to the rescue.

She was half the man's size and weight, but she defended herself with a desperation that held off his advantage. Once she scored with a rake of her fingernails across his leathern cheek that brought the quick blood and a curse as she all but broke clear, while he strove to get an arm about her.

The oath was but half delivered when Slim cracked the attacker neatly over the elbow with the barrel of his Colt, and slid the gun back into holster while the other, letting go the girl, swerved to face the newcomer. He was rubbing his tingling, temporarily useless arm, and swearing in earnest.

"Shut up," snapped Slim. "Pronto, mister, or I'll put a hole through yo' wind-pipe!"

The man, conscious of his lame arm, sizing up Slim's calm countenance that was only a mask for flaming eyes that shone like steel, checked his tongue, looking at the cowboy with venomous eyes that rolled in yellowish whites, slightly blood-shot.

Slim had barely glanced at the girl. He was not interfering as a personal matter—save as the man had sworn at him directly—but as one of ordinary range chivalry. It would have been the same if the girl had been an old crone—even the mother of "Cherokee Mary."

For a man to handle a woman brutally was not permissible. That was the code of the West and the other had broken it. Slim intended to administer punishment. But first he swept off his sombrero to the lady, ignoring the scowling and now silent assailant, knowing that the other's gun arm was out of commission for the time being, sure also that there was small doubt about the man's will to speed bullet—or knife—to Slim's vitals.

"Looked like to me that you all might be annoyed some by this coyote," he said in his soft drawl that took nothing away

from his suggestion of efficiency, rather enhanced it, against his lithe and sinewy figure and the lights of battle already burning in his eyes. Yet he was a little abashed at the beauty of the girl; it smote him suddenly, like a light flashed in a dark room. Her eyes were a purplish gray, large of pupil and long of curling lashes; her nose, short and straight, showed above lips that were most clearly designed—even to Slim, that youthful, but sincere misogynist—for the tantalizing of all men and the ultimate reward of one. This, though at the moment they were set in a half sneer that did not relax as Slim spoke to her, while her eyes were anything but friendly.

"I suppose you meant well," she said, "but it was not at all necessary for you to interfere. I am quite capable of taking care of myself."

Like all men who are women-shy, Slim was particularly susceptible to their use of feminine weapons. He had no idea of their instinctive exaggerations. He was taken aback, feeling like a fool and fancying he looked like one, conscious of a jaw that sagged in sheer amazement.

Had he stumbled on a quarrel that was going to be eventually ended by a reconciliation the more satisfactory for the temper and violence that led up to it? He had heard of such things—usually between married folks. He knew of one or two examples personally, combinations of bullies and viragos that had helped him acquire his bachelor's degree. Did she like the roughness of this man? Was she by any chance, his wife? He saw no wedding ring on the brown, but shapely hand, and— It was incredible that a girl who looked like her could endure such familiarity! There must be some special reason for her utterance.

The ardor that, on her behalf, had fanned the flame of his chivalry, wavered and blew strong again. But he left her out of the affair from that moment.

"I'm right sorry I disturbed you all," he said gravely, and the note of sarcasm was hard to distinguish, though the girl looked at him as if she suspected its presence. Then her glance changed. Warning leaped



into it. Slim's back was to the man. She might have spoken, but he whirled at the first hint of caution.

The other's gun was out of its holster before Slim's hand started to swoop down to the butt of his own weapon. The odds were all in favor of the first to draw.

"Stick yore hands up, cowboy. Paw the sky," the stranger said, his sloe eyes glittering evilly, his uncouth face twisted with rage and the desire, the intent, to kill. He was more beast than man at the moment. Slim's first dexterous blow had left him half crazy with one set purpose—to get even. Slim saw that he meant to fire, whether he lifted his hands or not.

"Sled" Raynor had started in as ranch blacksmith and wound up as foreman, partly by natural ability, partly by his bullying tactics backed by personal prowess that made him able to boss the ordinary run of hands, and aided by a cunning that was efficient, though of a low order.

He made the boast and held the reputation of being the fastest man with a gun in Caroca County—also the worst, so far as real manhood was concerned. But this last was not generally mentioned. Sled had his following, and it was not scrupulous. But he was proud of his gunplay, proud of his speed and his strength and, if anyone had told him that a man could stand with his back to him and then beat him out with a gun draw to the level, Sled would have laughed loudly before he proclaimed the other a liar, and laid bets to prove his own superiority.

"Stick 'em up, you——!"

The pause came as Sled's eyes widened in astonishment, with something of the terror of a bully who finds himself beaten at his own game.

Slim's gun came out of leather in a blue streak. His elbow stiffened close beside his hip, forearm almost level. He wore his gun low.

There was the merest jerk as the barrel settled into position with its ominous muzzle, like the eye of death, lined on Sled's heart—just a fraction of a second ahead of Sled's own weapon, that was still slightly deflected toward the ground.

Under his swarthy skin, Sled's pigmentary cells reacted like those of a chameleon. He turned gray with the fear of the grave upon him, while he quailed and sobered at

the menace and contempt in the eyes of Slim. All the urge of the mescal he had drunk in Caroca that morning died out of him.

By a tremendous effort he checked the rise of his gun. An inch more and Slim's Colt would belch fire and lead. Sled dropped the ivory-handled weapon in sign of defeat, in token of surrender, in a mute plea for mercy.

Slim stooped, supple as a big cat, picked up the gun, broke it, sprayed the cartridges on the turf and handed the weapon to the girl. She took it, in a sort of daze at the swift vision she had had of sudden and violent death, and its diversion by the swift action of the drawling stranger.

She stared wide-eyed as Slim ejected the shells from his own Colt into the palm of his hand, pocketed them, returned the empty gun to holster and deliberately slapped Sled Raynor across the face.

This was a challenge calculated as much to smooth the rebuff he had received from the girl as by a desire to give Sled the lesson he ached to administer. The girl's snub had penetrated farther, lay deeper than Slim imagined.

The color came back to Sled's face, the sting of the blow roused his spirit. The fear of death was taken from him, and the other was delivered into his great hands. He came at the lighter man with the bellow of a bull, fists half open, clutching for a clinch that Slim avoided, sending Sled staggering with a smash to the jaw that rocked his head. Slim, ducking a wild flail, landed his left full on the mouth, splitting a lip, breaking the skin of his own knuckles against the other's teeth.

From the standpoint of a sporting spectator it was a pretty, but one-sided fight. Slim had all the best of it. He had no ring to hem him in and he eluded Sled's rushes as easily as a *banderillero* avoids the charge of the bull. His first two blows had taken away some of Sled's new-found confidence. The bitter hemlock of defeat had actually been handed to the bully in the moment when his gunplay proved inadequate. He rushed and roared and flogged in a blind rage, one eye promptly closed and rapidly blackening, his ribs drummed in a tattoo that did his wind no good, all his best blows warded off, dodged, ducked, by the assailant who danced about him with arms shuttling in and out.

The girl stood apart with small fists clenched at her sides, her face a riddle that was hard to read. She had dropped the



gun resentfully on realizing that she had apparently been made a convenience of, and she watched the swift, short combat with eyes that missed nothing, her lips parted, her slender body tense with excitement.

Once or twice she gasped, and caught her lip when, at last, Slim got home with a jolt that shot from hip to point with the propulsive force of Slim's shoulder muscles behind it. Sled hit the grass, quivered, surged vainly in an attempt to rise, and lay still, his nerve connections shattered.

Slim looked at his man, measuring his length, and then he walked away without a backward glance, ignoring the girl until he had mounted. Then he once more swept off his sombrero, touched spurs to Pete's flanks and loped away, while Sled got staggering to his feet and the girl gazed after him with curious speculation in her eyes.

SLIM met the same poker players in Caroca before he had been there many hours, and once again the fatuous pride of the amateur card-player was humbled by the technique of the professional, against which the best of luck was ground as against a grindstone. His second night found him with his money vanished, and his experience a little extended. He sat between two worthies who whipsawed him beautifully, tilting his raises until he was forced to drop many a good hand by their persistency, only to see a lower win.

He lost the last of his dollars on a show-down, swallowed the drink that the winner of the last jackpot had bought, according to card custom, rolled a cigarette and declared himself through.

"Empty as a last year's bird's-nest, gents," he said with a smile. "Now I've got to git me a job. Mebbe I've learned enough sense to keep away from a game I don't know how to play—not havin' a heap of practice—but I doubt it. I'll probably be back some time, soon's I git me a roll. Anyone know of someone aimin' to hire a hand?"

The players did not, but a man stopped him near the door.

"If you're lookin' for a job," he said, "Joe Walsh is in the dance-hall takin' a whirl. He owns the T. P. outfit. I heard him early this evenin' sayin' he needed a rider. Got some colts he wants busted. You look like you could ride some."

"My laigs are long enough, if that's

what you mean," said Slim. "I'm much obliged to you for tellin' me. I wish I could ask you to have a little liquor, with me, suh, but I'm clean. What so't of a lookin' gent is this Walsh?"

The man described him briefly but accurately, and Slim readily picked him out as the dance ended and the partners went to the tables for the inevitable order.

Walsh was a good looking chap with a weak chin and a ready, but somewhat vacuous laugh that was encouraged by the liquor he had drunk. He was fairly sober, but his talk was inclined to babble, and his attentions to the synthetic blonde with whom he clinked glasses had long since passed the merely friendly stage.

Slim knew that in all probability the girl would leave Walsh as soon as the music started for the next dance. There were at least six men for every girl and, while some of them were dance-shy, it was not considered good form for any man to attempt a monopoly of girls hired as public entertainers, at least during business hours. The girls regarded this custom as a set rule and, as the jazzy orchestra of Mexicans struck up, the blonde diplomatically disengaged herself with a smile and a side-long look at Slim that was clearly an invitation. But Slim, slipping into a seat next to Walsh, disregarded it.

The girl was not without her good looks and Walsh, after an ineffectual clutch at her, gazed at Slim with eyes that were becoming vacuous, but held a hint of resentment at the latter's intrusion.

If Slim had danced with the girl he would have lost all chance of a job with the T. P. outfit. But he had no fancy for it, though he liked dancing well enough on occasion. Dance-hall girls were to him impersonal objects. He was sorry for them, though he knew that in the main they were well able to take care of themselves.

"Heard you all were lookin' fo' a rider," he said to Walsh. The rancher seemed to pull his features together, and his loose lips tightened. "I'm lookin' fo' a job," Slim added.

Walsh surveyed him with a glance that took in the other's evident efficiency, visibly stamped upon him from dented Stetson to high-heeled boots.

"I can use another man," he said. "Got some colts that need breaking. After that



line-riding. Been losin' stock lately. You ain't afraid to shoot—case it was necessary?"

"Reckon not," drawled Slim. "What are you all paying?"

Walsh countered with a question that showed he had business sense, for all the tell-tale signs of weakness written on his smooth-shaven face, and the odor of whisky on his breath. Slim told of previous employ, and a bargain was made.

"I ain't goin' out to Tres Piños till tomorrow morning," said Walsh. "You need an advance?"

"They got my last pay-check divided up between 'em in there," said Slim with a laugh, nodding toward the adjoining gambling room. "But I got my room an' my hawss paid fo' up till termorrer. I ate a good supper an' I reckon I can make out without drawin' none. I suah hate to do that. My belt's full of ca'tridges an' I got plenty Bull Durham an' papehs. So I'm set."

There were things about Walsh that Slim rather liked. One of them was the way in which he respected Slim's independence and did not press the loan.

"Have breakfast with me," he said. "We can talk things over. And have a drink now to cinch the contract."

Slim accepted. The man who brought the whisky told Walsh that some friends were waiting for him to make up a game.

"Promised 'em I'd play," he said. "See you later. I'll find out if my luck's any better than yours." With a reluctant look to where the blonde was dancing with a burly and none too agile cattleman, the owner of the T. P. outfit at Tres Piños lurched over the floor and disappeared.

Slim finished his drink and rolled a cigarette. He had landed a job, which was the main thing and gave him content, but there were certain things about it that provided food for thought. He was not a professional bronco buster, a job usually performed by a specialist trailing from outfit to outfit, but he had no doubt of his own ability to handle unbroken colts. It was the suggestion that stock was being taken from Walsh that interested him. It held a hint of adventure that appealed to him. Walsh was, he considered, the type of man apt to be lax in his handling of ranch affairs. He had brains enough if he cared to concentrate them upon business and not depreciate them with alcohol and affairs with dance-hall girls. That, of course, was his own affair and none of Slim's, but the latter wondered what sort

of foreman he would find at the ranch. Unless that individual was essentially capable he did not think the T. P. outfit likely to be paying many dividends. It does not take the loss of many steers to swallow up profits.

The dance ended. The blonde refused a drink with her partner, which meant a percentage loss to her and his dissatisfaction. His eyes followed her resentfully as she made for the table where Slim was sitting, but he accepted the situation and vanished in the direction of the bar.

"I wouldn't dance with that bear," she told Slim as she took the seat that Walsh had just left. "Most of 'em dance like they were crushing rock. It's a treat to get a partner that's light on his feet." She flirted with the set of her dress at the shoulder strap, pouted as she saw the effect was lost on Slim, asked him for the makings, and rolled a cigarette deftly as he could have done it himself. Save for a certain hardness, like a mask, enhanced by her makeup, she possessed beauty, and a measure of individual charm that had not been altogether tarnished. Beyond doubt she was a favorite, and used to having her favors appreciated. Her singling out of Slim, a newcomer, had been noticed. She considered him with a sidelong glance between darkened lashes.

"Aren't you going to buy me a drink?" she asked. Slim flushed a little under his tan.

"I'd like to," he said, "but I'm flat as a sheet of papeh. Just hired out to the T. P. outfit because my roll done evaporated."

"Joe Walsh hired you? He's a good friend of mine. He promised to get up a picnic for me out to the ranch."

Slim eliminated all expression from his face. He might have made it too blank, for the girl looked at him sharply. A ranch where girls of the blonde's type were invited out on pleasure parties by the owner did not coincide with his idea of a properly run outfit. Play was one thing, but pastimes of this type were better kept away from the range.

"You're from the South, 'ain't you?" she went on. "I'm from Geo'gia myse'f. I was bohn in Savannah." Her accent was suddenly assertive and, to Slim, it sounded somewhat spurious, though he was too polite to pass even silent judgment. He knew mighty little about girls. This one made him uneasy, though that she had chosen him as a favorite was patent, even to his lack of conceit. "I like Southern

boys," she continued. "They know how to treat a lady, no matter in what circumstances they happen to find her. You'll have a drink with me? And tell me yo' name?"

Slim looked at her, smiled and shook his head.

"I don't mind tellin' you my name," he said. "It's Robert Marvin—Slim they call me mostly. But I reckon I'd rather wait till I can pay fo' the treat, thankin' you just the same."

The girl flared up. The spark had started some time since when her woman's instinct had told her that Slim was not falling for her blandishments. She had noticed smiles and looks between girls at other tables that meant slurs later against her powers of fascination. Slim showed well in a woman's eyes. They sensed his physical strength and mental cleanness. In a different, virile way, he was as graceful as any woman. That he had not responded to the advances of the girl who was assumed to be the main feminine attraction at the Cactus did not lessen his attractiveness to these worn sirens, but it gave them a desired tool with which to probe her. And she knew they would not hesitate to use it.

"Slim is right," she said, her voice a trifle shrill, her nostrils dilating as she rose. "Slim on manners and slim on *dinero*. What's the idea of sitting in here if you can't buy a round? If you want to bum drinks you stand a better chance in the bar, cowboy."

Her hands were on her hips and the keen edge of a brittle temper showed in her eyes as she looked contemptuously at him, and then glanced round. Slim sensed that she was spoiling for a row, hoping to find a champion. His face hardened, and his eyes were like bits of ice when she met them again. Their chill seemed to affect the girl. She shivered and turned the action into a shrug as she walked away, the virago in her momentarily subdued, until she heard the titter of her mates.

Slim slowly turned brick red, challenged as a bum and unable to disprove it. He felt that the eyes of all the room were upon him. He developed a cold rage at the girl behind his heat, and knew that he had made an enemy of her. She might try to

use her influence with Walsh to lose Slim his job. Not that Slim bothered overmuch about losing a job, but he had cottoned to Walsh somehow, for all the other's condition. He did not think Walsh was the man to fire a good hand on account of the dislike of a dance-hall girl; he did not believe that Walsh, sober, was infatuated with La Rose one half so much as La Rose was trying to get Walsh into her web by hook or crook. Slim's experience of such women was largely vicarious, but what he did know caused him to consider them hard as nails where business was concerned. And their business was one side of what men considered pleasure.

Still the taunt she flung at him rankled. It made him refuse more than one invitation from men he had met and treated while his money lasted, and he left the Cactus early and abruptly, his new employer busy at a game of stud poker. Slim went to the stable where Pete was corraled, and saw that the bay had been fed and watered properly before he strolled to his hotel. It was too early to turn in. He had nothing better to do than talk to Pete, who was at least a good listener. So Slim squatted down in the starlight where Pete pulled at his hay inside a shelter and shade shed, stretched along one side of the corral and divided into stalls for feeding purposes.

"She'd as soon knifed me as not, Pete," he said softly. "I'll say she'd be some catamount when she gits into action. It's a safe bet she's no friend of mine from now on."

It was a safe bet. La Rose, stung by the looks and whispers of the other girls, had her chagrin made superlative by the fact that the broad-shouldered narrow-hipped cowboy with his clean manliness and frank eyes had somehow broken through a hard and bitter shell to instincts she had not experienced since her girlhood, and she hated and despised herself for response to that involuntary appeal. Here was the type of man she—as a girl—would have intuitively desired for a mate. All that sort of thing was long since over.

Slim had looked at her with cold eyes, he had made her afraid, made her feel where he placed her. She had humiliated him, she hoped, but not more than she was herself humiliated.

"He ain't the kind to take up with my sort," she told herself. "Thinks I'm dirt under his feet. Damn him, I'll get even with him, if it kills me!"

Women of her type, having cast away delicacy, are the more sensitive of any de-



preciation by another. Excitement to them means forgetfulness, and La Rose craved for ascendancy over men. Slim had touched a side of her, long unresponsive, and his fancied contempt spurred her beyond reason.

She had no especial fondness for Walsh. With Walsh's foreman she had had an affair which threatened to terminate before she desired it. The man had grown cold. She had seen her power over him slipping and sought to bring him back by using Walsh. That was her motive for making the owner of the T. P. outfit promise her a picnic. And now Slim had hired out there. So she had a triple reason for going—to show the foreman that she could bring down bigger game than he was, at the same time to flaunt her triumph in front of Slim, whom, somehow, she would contrive to again humiliate, and to tighten her hold on Walsh. She might get him to marry her—one way or another. It began to look as if her attractions were on the wane. It was up to her to make hay while her sun still shone. To marry Walsh, to discharge the foreman and also Slim, that would wind up matters beautifully, and show her tittering, gossiping mates that La Rose still queened it over all of them.

Of the three men she liked the foreman best. He was a blackguard who bullied her, but La Rose craved a master, even if he were cruel.

She gripped fiercely the arm of her clumsy, but complimentary partner, so that the man looked at her in surprise.

"What's eatin' you?" he asked. "Yore eyes look like a pizen snake's."

She forced them to become languishing, but she had not fooled the man. He dropped her for the rest of the evening after he had bought a round when the dance ended.

"I wonder who she's gunnin' for?" he asked himself. "These gals are all hell for excitement. Me, I'm not mixin' in."

La Rose watched the door. The foreman of the T. P. had promised her he would be there. She knew of no reason why he should stay away just because Walsh had come to town. She had meant him to see her dancing with Walsh, but now she would try and work up a quarrel between him and the stranger who had rebuffed her so firmly. The fore-

man would not know that the other had been hired. After he had quarreled with him he would keep him out of his job—if he still wanted one worse than he did the doctor, or the undertaker. There were notches on the handle of the foreman's gun.

But he did not appear. She did not want to ask Walsh about him and Walsh was taken up by his game. Even La Rose dared not invade the gambling room. But she looked in and saw that Slim was not there, that he had left the Cactus—and charged that against his score. Three men had failed her in one evening. Her spite was the more bitter for being restrained. Women like La Rose craved hectic emotions. It helped them to forget realities that sometimes came to them in the early mornings, when the wind swept clean and sharp across the sage from the mesa, charged with sweet herbs and pungent cedar, and when little children gathered sand lilies in hot and grubby hands.

La Rose flung herself into all the excitement of the Cactus dance-hall, became the center of it, danced a mad *pas seul*, drank hard liquor instead of her usual synthetic *crème de menthe* and, two hours after midnight, burst into a fit of sobbing as one of the girls, with the eyes of a saint and the soul of a devil—if a devil has a soul—pushed the pianist away from his seat, played some simple chords, and sang in a childish voice an old, old song.

*Golden years ago, in a mill beside the sea,
There lived a little maiden, who plighted
her troth to me;*

*The mill wheel it is silent now, the maid's
eyes closed be*

*And all that now remaineth are, the words
she sang to me.*

*Do not forget me, do not forget me,
Think sometimes of me still.*

*And, when the morning breaks and the
throstle awakes,*

Remember the maid of the mill.

Saccharine sentiment, tawdry and tarnished the more for the time, the place and the singer. But La Rose sobbed with her head on a table.

"Must have been her favorite song when it first came out," said her principal rival. "I remember my mother singing it to me when I was a kid."

A knife flashed from La Rose's bosom and the rival fled. That was La Rose, a prey to her emotions, with memories of a wilful youth and a spirit always haunted by the ghost of what-might-have-been.



Slim had stretched himself out beside Pete. There was sufficient bedding in the stall to temper the hard clay beneath, but comparative softness of mattresses mattered little to Slim. Pete was company. It was better there than in the stuffy little hotel room. The breeze blew in on him, and he could see the stars beneath the eaves of the tiled roof of the shelter.

He lay there, with a bent arm for a pillow and thought of the girl of Owl Canyon. Not deliberately. It started with a renewed satisfaction at the beating he had given the bully and then her face, beautiful, baffling in its expression, monopolized his musing. She had warned him, even though she had snubbed him. And she was the most beautiful—and the most disturbing—element that had so far entered his life. He could not get rid of her.

He didn't like that and he tried, without success, to dismiss her with thoughts of his new job and speculations as to what it would be like. But he had little to base these last upon—save the reference to his shooting ability. He had heard, vaguely, of organized cattle rustling in Caroca County, which might make things exciting. But these matters would not crystalize, he could not herd his fancies. The girl's face again obtruded, fading only before drowsiness that was natural enough, seeing that he had sat up most of the night previous and the night before that, trying, first to multiply, and then to hang on to his stake.

He was practically asleep when voices aroused him. His senses became instantly alert, but he did not move. Two men—riders by their hats and their walk, proclaimed vaguely silhouetted against the out-of-doors as they entered the open shed—glanced in where Pete turned his wise head to look at them and swung it back, indifferently, to his feed. Slim, on the floor, was indistinguishable, not to be looked for. There was the click of a matchhead against a nail, the odor of tobacco smoke.

Then came their voices, low-pitched, in the next stall.

"Seen anything of the Chief?" asked one. "Time he showed up. I want to

draw some money. There's a game on that looks good to me."

"You won't git none out of the Chief ternight."

"Why won't I? He stayed behind to collect for fifteen fat three-year-olds, didn't he? I helped deliver 'em, didn't I? I got something comin' to me, ain't I?" The speaker was truculent, partly drunk. The other expostulated with him.

"We got to git back to the ranch. Hawsses are tired, an' we got to ride some to git back by breakfast."

"Aw, to hell with the ranch an' breakfast, too! Why don't the Chief pull somethin' worth while 'stead of pickin' off these picayune bunches? There's money comin' to me, and I want it."

"And spile the whole layout. Wouldn't be healthy for you if you did that. Folks see you blowin' money round like you was a millionaire, 'stead of a ranch hand, an' they'll begin talkin'."

"Let 'em talk. I'll tell the Chief straight out the way I feel about it——"

"Tell me what?"

A third man had come into the shed and stood at the end of the stall where Slim lay, wondering what rancher was going to miss fifteen steers in the morning. The newcomer's voice was harsh and threatening.

"If you boys can't keep yore tongues from clackin' we'll have to have 'em tended to," he threatened roughly.

"There ain't no one round here," defended the grumbler, a bit lamely.

"That's got nothin' to do with it. You know the rules. 'F you've got any kick comin'—an' you ain't—you put it up to the Council. There's big things movin', and we don't aim to have them sp'iled by any loose-jawed punchers. You boys git yore hawsses, an' we'll light for home. I've been busy figgerin' how to put *dinero* in yore pockets while you been lappin' up booze. Come on."

Slim could dimly see the horse the last comer had ridden, standing ground-anchored in the corral. The two others, silenced, brought their mounts out of stalls at the far end of the shed. The "Chief"



remained at the head of Slim's improvised bedchamber, and Slim took no chances on shifting in the rustling straw.

That the fifteen steers had been stolen he held no doubt; also none that any suggestion of an eavesdropper would call for shooting first and investigation afterward. Though the voice of the Chief seemed vaguely familiar he could not place it. He had heard many new voices the past couple of days and nights. The matter was none of his immediate business. Rustlers he had no use for, as a matter of his profession, but he had his moments of discretion and all the cowboy's inherent dislike of horning in—for all his swift championing of the girl in Owl Canyon. That was quite a different affair from this. He had no proof against these men save casual talk, or talk that could easily appear casual, even if he had been employed to look out for cattle thieves.

The two others came up, leading their already saddled mounts, left in the corral while their owners liquored up, as many others had done. All three mounted with the despatch of long custom and were off, stirring up the soft dirt of the corral into a cloud that mantled itself about them, as Slim slid out of his stall for a closer look.

If Pete had been saddled he might have followed them. Not figuring on needing the bay before morning, he had taken his saddle into the office of the stable. As it was, they were outbound for the ranch, and, as he told himself, it was not he who had lost the fifteen steers. The night was chilly. He had not noticed it so much in the stall with Pete as an impromptu stove, but he did now and decided that the hotel bed, with its blankets, was the better place for the sleep he still sorely needed.

FRIENDSHIPS between men are more rapidly, more frequently and more firmly formed than between women. In these comradeships of men their instincts are as surely to be trusted as those of women under other circumstances. Unless a woman comes between—and not always then—such sudden affiliations are apt to knit into bonds that last a lifetime, untouched by jealousies. The habit and the certitude of choice date back to primitive days when it was essential to quickly distinguish between friend and foe.

Particularly is this true in frontier life when there are no conventions, no interweaving of business diplomacies or social obligations. A man's judgment of his fellow is unwarped, even as it is sharpened

by the lack of other credentials, and tempered by indifference as to references or past records.

For a while, as Slim and Walsh rode out toward Tres Piños together, the latter was uncommunicative. He had not been able to eat breakfast, and he confided to his new rider that he had a splitting headache.

"I wish you'd taken an advance from me last night," he said. "I'd be that much ahead of those sharps that trimmed me last night. Either my luck's no better than yours at cards, or we both play the same game—which ain't as good as theirs is."

"Li'l of both, I reckon," Slim assented.

The fresh air of early morning and the action of the ride gradually alleviated Walsh's day-after symptoms. His eyes were still muddy and he had recourse to a "hair of the dog that had bitten him," but he grew more cheerful and communicative. The two took a mutual liking to each other. Walsh had a whimsical way of self-depreciation that was alluring, and Slim liked his face for all that its markings told of weakness and indulgence. There were one or two lines that suggested bitterness, and he wondered at these. Now and then a fleeting look of hardness passed over the features of the owner of Tres Piños as if he had unpleasant thoughts, but Slim decided that the man was his own worst enemy, with plenty of good qualities that might have been better developed under different circumstances. His follies had not made him less amiable, and there was a distinct charm about him—as there was about Slim's own straightforwardness and buoyancy of perfect physique.

"Hope you'll like it at Tres Piños," said Walsh. "We'll do what we can to make you. They say we set the best table in the county. Got a Chink cook, but my sister runs the commissary and she's a wonder." His face clouded.

"I've made a full-sized ass of myself," he went on ruefully. "You know the blonde I was with—reckon you danced with her. She sure can lift a light and lively hoof and she can wheedele a man out of his back teeth, especially if there was any gold in 'em. I don't know as I ought to say that. La Rose is square enough, I reckon, and she's got to make her living."

"She wants to get out of the game she's in. Asked me would I help her, and of course I said yes. Fair enough, but I promised I'll get up some sort of a picnic for her out to the ranch. That was easy enough last night but, well, there's nothing of the snob about my sister Belle, but she

draws her lines, an' I reckon a gal that dances at the Cactus is outside of 'em. On top of that La Rose'll hold me to that promise. If I don't set the day, she's liable to show up with a crowd of her friends. She say anything about it to you?"



Slim's eyes twinkled and crinkled at the corners as he

nodded, and Walsh groaned.

"If Belle took a notion on her own account to help her out it 'ud be different. But she ain't strong on me goin' to the Cactus at all. It's a fact I usually come home broke, an' the worse for wear. You—you wouldn't want to invite La Rose out some Sunday on yore own account? You could say she wanted to buy a hawss. Mebbe we could fix things up that way."

"I don't reckon she'd come fo' my askin'," said Slim. "I didn't git on right well with her last night. An' I'd sure hate to git in wrong with yore sister right off the jump." Walsh groaned.

"Reckon I got to draw out my own hoof. Funny you didn't get along with La Rose. I don't go to the Cactus more'n once a month on an average, an' she always seemed a prime favorite with all the boys."

Slim turned the talk. "You said somethin' about losin' stock when you hired me," he said. "You all been havin' trouble with rustlers?"

Walsh turned in his saddle with his face suddenly grown hard and stern.

"Reckon I was drinking more'n I figured. Makes a man talk foolish an' loose. You better forget that, Marvin."

"I sure will," said Slim, and kept his wonder to himself that a man who had been missing fat steers should want to keep quiet about it.

"We'll be home inside of an hour," Walsh spoke up presently as, at mid-morning, stopping at a willowed spring to breathe and water the ponies, they halted amid the first slopes of the foothills toward which they had been steadily riding. "I've got a good ranch," Walsh went on, "belongs to Belle and myself, half an' half. Old Man left it that way. Plenty of water, good shade, lots of native grass an' open range back of it atop the mesa. Full section under wire. T. P. beef fetches top price. The Old Man always kept the stock up with thoroughbred bulls and I've done the same. We've got a lot of land

under water an' in alfalfa. Modern methods all through. That's our plan. We're aimin' to get the right sort of hands who'll stay through with us. Expect to make the place coöperative. We haven't got that far yet," he added, and his voice trailed off, lost its note of pride, while his volatile features dulled.

With the other silent, Slim, finishing his smoke, pictured Belle Walsh, idly enough, unconcerned in the matter outside of his appetite and its satisfaction. She would be older than her brother, he imagined, taffy-colored of hair with a stout and shapeless figure, a prime cook and house-keeper, but inclined to be fussy as to the condition of mess-hall and bunkhouse. She would be generally intent upon keeping the riders in their places, which meant away from the ranch-house. There only the favored foreman, by right of established, unwritten law, might claim the privilege of evening entertainment and, sometimes, take his meals. But so long as the grub was good that did not bother Slim, and he did not mean to bother the lady.

They entered a draw that gradually narrowed to a gulch. Back of the mesa that ever loomed up before them like a great wall, a dark cloud was slowly rising and advancing. Against it the face of the mesa was startlingly displayed, its vivid hues glaring under the sun in shades of red, with three great pines plain in the immediate foreground as if they stood on the very verge of the mesa cliff. They were old and their shafts towered high before a bough branched off. One was bare of foliage, lightning blasted, the two others tufted with dark but vivid green.

Walsh pointed them out as they crossed the sparkling, shallow creek that suddenly looped its way across the draw, with big trout darting, broad-backed and powerful of fin, for shelter from the invading hoofs.

"Tres Piños," he said, pride once again in his tones. "They named the place for it before my dad's time. Folks claim they're three hundred years old. That's what the Indians say. Great landmarks. Look prime against that cloud, don't they? That looks like a cloudburst, but we ought to beat it home. You'll hear this crick singin' when it breaks.

"By thunder! That's Belle now. Seen us comin'."

Slim saw a rider on a pinto horse, and the rider seemed slim as a 'boy. In the garish light the racing object stood out theatrically, half enveloped in the cloud of

dust it raised and which trailed away behind, holding a vivid color of its own as the reaching cloud obscured half the heavens and the sun, overhead, illumined the other half.

Slim chuckled to himself at his preconceived notion of Walsh's sister. No stout, taffy-haired woman of middle age would have ridden the mustang like a whirlwind. The pony's glossy hide gleamed silver and copper. There was a fleck of brilliant orange color at the girl's neck, flaring long before there was any chance of distinguishing features. Yet there came over Slim a curious feeling, the premonition he defined as a hunch, developing into certainty as the oncoming rider, catapulting down that narrow trail, tossed up an arm in greeting while Walsh shouted a welcome. Genuine affection between these two, Slim told himself, and suddenly felt an outsider, unattached and lonely.

Here was the girl he had rescued from the bully. He had considered that she had been both rude and ungrateful. Despite the visions of the night, he had ordered himself to forget her, and now his heart pumped furiously, so that he could feel the hot blood tingling to his finger-tips and stealing beneath the skin of his tanned face, flooding his brain a little until he felt confused and a little giddy. No girl had ever made him feel that way before. He resented it. He was a little frightened at it, somewhere inside of him. Just as a wild horse shudders at the touch of a human hand, fearful of loss of liberty.

But she was a beauty! That smote him again, fairly between the eyes, as the stone from David's sling smote Goliath. She wore no hat, but her black hair was sleeked around her shapely head like a helmet of shining leather. Her breath came swiftly with the speed and excitement of the ride, and her eyes shone. They were violet today, rather than gray. The silken neckerchief, the color of burned orange, the only high note in her dress, heightened the hue of them, complemented the golden transparency of her sunkissed skin, flushed with healthy rose, brought up the carmine of her lips.

A gypsy girl, a disturber of men's happiness, surely; rather than a caterer to their comforts. Her brother had called her a wonder, and only that word described her, Slim told himself. Somewhere out of the past came a song he had heard a Mexican singing in a *jacal* to the twang of a guitar. Slim hadn't noticed the words much, but they had stuck, and now they leaped

out of his brain to fit the girl before him.

Eyes like stars that shine so bright
In the azure depths of night;
Voice that thrills like song of lark,
Breath as sweet as breeze that blows
O'er the jasmine and the rose
'Twixt the twilight and the dark.

It was the first time that Slim had ever been deliberately and personally sentimental. Something had happened to him. This slip of a girl glancing at him as if she had never seen him before, as if she did not care if she never saw him again. While he—? Inwardly he fumed with a complexity of feelings. And felt himself somehow bound.

"Slim Marvin is goin' to ride for us," said Walsh. "He's the kind we want. Goin' to start in bustin' colts. Up to you to keep him contented, Sis."

The girl's eyebrows went up slightly, as if she were surprised at her brother's enthusiastic endorsement of an untried employe. She gave Slim a cool little nod—



"like a queen might hand out to a beggar," he fancied.

"A good hand's always welcome at Tres Piños," she said with irritating emphasis. "I think I saw Mr. Garvin Tuesday in Owl Canyon. He must have been on his way to Caroca."

"The name's Marvin, miss," said Slim. "Not Garvin." There was anger back of his quick flush, but he followed her lead. She might fear that he would take advantage of the affair; at all events she showed plainly she did not want it referred to. "But I don't remember meetin' you all," he drawled. "Seems like I should have."

That got him a gleam from her eyes—direct. He could not decide if it meant surprise, anger, a certain admiration or more positive amusement. She was baffling, and he was vexed at wanting to solve the riddle of her. Girls had always represented unknown quantities to him, so far, and he had been content to let it go at that. This one puzzled him and at the same time

challenged him. It was annoying to feel this way; funny, too, that this girl and the one he had met just before, La Rose, should both show dislike of him. Anyway, he had assured her he was not going to say anything about what had happened in Owl Canyon.

He dropped back, letting brother and sister ride together. He could see that they soon got into talk that hinged on serious matters, the girl relating indignantly something that had happened, the man angry, receiving it wrathfully, then slumping suddenly with a shrug of his shoulders while the girl flared up and rode ahead in a flash of anger. She pricked her pinto to a lope that took them to the narrow trail that wound up the right hand cliff to the bench above.

She could hardly have told her brother of the Owl Canyon episode after practically denying it before Slim. Still, she might have eliminated Slim from her version. It was single trail now and, when the men reached the bench, the girl had vanished into a grove of cottonwoods that screened off the main portion of the T. P. buildings. Slim came up beside Walsh who rode on in gloomy self communion, and they loped in silence by fields of emerald alfalfa, growing vigorously under irrigation. The whole ranch bore signs of careful planning, though there were hints here and there of carelessness—tools left out, a broken lateral gate, a windmill that squeaked.

Though Walsh's face was somber, his brows were creased and his mouth and jaw firmer than Slim had so far seen them. He ventured a remark.

"Likely stand. Second crop, I reckon?"

"Yep." Walsh shook off his depression. Alfalfa does fine. Belle's goin' in with the car to Caroca after dinner. Nothin' you left behind?"

"My haws is packin' all I own, 'cept my second string pony. Left him in the next county. I'll send fo' him sometime, or my friend'll ship him oveh."

The big cloud was perilously close to the sun, ominous. The three pines were still in vivid light, the middle one showing almost white, blasted and barked by a lightning flash that had spared, or only seared, the other two. It looked not unlike a great gallows, Slim thought, the fancy heightened by the presence of a buzzard on the outstanding horizontal limb.

They trotted down a narrow lane between two corrals while the sky began to darken more and more, and things became strange-

ly silent like the world under an eclipse. The advancing cloud was dense enough to blot out any sun.

"Belle'll lay off that trjp, I reckon," said Walsh, as they emerged in full sight of the long, low ranch-house, verandaed, fresh painted, a big stone chimney at one end, curtains and window boxes giving evident signs of a woman's competent direction. These were enhanced by the comfortable wicker chairs in orderly array on the porch and the unusual flower garden within a whitewashed picket fence, where old-fashioned flowers stood, their vivid blossoms strangely flat in the light that had lost all shadow as the fringe of the cloud reached out and veiled the sun.

A man came out from a small shack that had a sign on it—OFFICE—advancing toward them to suddenly stop and stare at Slim, who gazed back with his face as hard as granite, his body, easy in the saddle, suddenly alert, hand falling back instinctively toward his gun butt.

For a moment the man's bruised face was devilish, then it twisted into shape, the eyes still smouldering malevolently though the mouth, with its cut lip, formed into



what was meant for a grin as Walsh called out, "Hello, Sled! Here's Slim Marvin. Used to be with T-

in-a-box, over in the next county. Goin' to break those colts for a start. He's on the payroll. Slim, this is Sled Raynor, foreman."

Slim's watchful eyes were glinting like mica flakes in granite, but Raynor only nodded at him with rough acknowledgment that was outwardly friendly.

"We sure need a good buster," he said. "Glad to meet you, Marvin. Grub'll be ready soon. Some of the boys in. Two of them ridin' wire an' the rest on cavy. They'll bring in those colts. Kind of worried I'd have to break 'em myself. You'll find a couple spare bunks in the bunkhouse. Take either of 'em. Make yorese'f at home. Chow's in the leanto back of the house.

Slim was plainly dismissed—with another puzzle. It began to look as if Belle Walsh and Sled Raynor had mutually agreed to say nothing of what had happened. Why? She did not seem the sort to permit insult.

"What about this fifteen head, Sled?" he

heard Walsh demanding as he rode toward the bunkhouse. "Belle tells me they were run off last night. It's plumb funny I lose cattle whenever I go to town. Plumb funny they always happen to be three-year-olds." Slim caught the reply, assured, almost insolent.

"Ain't it? That's jest how it did happen."

"No one ridin' herd? Look here, Sled—" Walsh's voice, thickly passionate, stopped. His sister was coming down the path between the tall larkspurs. She had changed into a gingham gown and a hat that fitted snugly, pulling on gloves as she came.

"I'm going to eat in town, Joe," she said, her voice cool. "You and Sled can talk things over by yourselves."

Raynor had pulled off his hat, but the girl paid no attention to him beyond the reference in her speech. She must have caught the note of quick rage in her brother's halted speech. She passed so close to Raynor that she almost brushed him, but he might well have been the gate post, and his swarthy face turned almost purple with the bruises black upon it at the slight.

There was thunder in the air, storm about to break loose, but Slim fancied that all the tenseness did not come entirely from the atmospheric conditions.

"You can't go in now, sis. That cloud's goin' to break inside of a few minutes. You'll never make the crick till it goes down."

"I'll go round by the big bridge," she said coldly. "I've got my slicker in the car. And I'm eating in town. Raynor's been eating in the bunkhouse, she added, pointedly, as she left the two gazing after her. It seemed to Slim that she was skirting deliberately on the edge of some dangerous topic, as if she dared Raynor to tell why he had eaten in the bunkhouse while Walsh was absent. Yet she had clearly avoided it before.

And the fifteen rustled steers! The three men in the corral shed! The one they had called Chief. There had been a moment last night when he had wondered if Sled Raynor's had been the voice he had thought he recognized. But it was not. The girl turned—called back.

"There's a message on your desk, Joe. I found it skewered to the front door this morning. I kept the knife that fastened it."

There was challenge in that. It was likely she did not expect Slim to hear it, though he was not sure about that. But

his ears were good. Walsh swung from his saddle, calling out for someone to come and take his horse as he strode up the path to the veranda, Raynor following. A cowboy with a face the color and texture of a walnut, bow-legged from the saddle, came hurrying to the horse. The girl had disappeared.

Slim unsaddled Pete hurriedly, turned him into a corral, toting his saddle and warbag for the refuge of the bunkhouse. The storm was on them.

He heard a flivver engine starting furiously as it was given gas. Then the sound was lost as a javelin of lightning rived the great curtain that was sweeping out to the plain and thunder pealed and crashed and pealed again, heralding the tremendous downpour of the rain, hissing as it struck the ground. The trees swayed. Rivulets started here and there, confluent, hurrying to the creek that would become a raging torrent in the next few minutes.

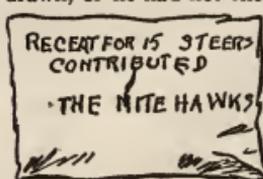
In the midst of it, racing with the storm, was the girl who had found the knife-skewered message on the door.

The interior of the bunkhouse was as dark as if it had been night. And it was empty. A flare of lightning showed it—stove and table, bunks and benches, a few chairs, odds and ends of personal belongings about. Slim dropped his heavy saddle to the floor.

There was trouble at Tres Piños—that was very evident—and Slim Marvin had a surefire hunch that he was destined to take a hand in that trouble.

THE girl and her brother sat together in the big living-room before a fire where pine burned briskly, for the nights on the mesa bench were cold. The ranch boasted an electric plant for pumping and lights and the electricity was veiled by tasteful shades of parchment. The quiet refinement of the room again evidenced the taste of Belle Walsh.

There was no one else present. Raynor's privilege had seemingly been withdrawn, or he had not chosen to exercise it.



The faces of brother and sister were grave. The girl held a paper in her hand, a square of wrapping paper on which

were roughly scrawled a few words in printed letters.

The paper showed a slit near its top.

She fingered a cheap hunting knife, the blade worn and the vulcanite handle scarred.

"How much longer are we going to stand for this sort of thing, Joe?" she asked. "The whole county scared by a mob that steals cattle and calls itself the Night Hawks. They say in town no one knows who belongs to it, or who doesn't, and they are all afraid to talk about it.

"Raynor had no night herd out. Claims he thought they were safe in the lower end of the gulch, not half a mile from the line fence. And this the third bunch we've lost this year. Three thousand dollars won't cover the loss. What are you going to do about it? Fire Raynor—or are you afraid of him?"

She flashed the final query passionately. Her brother covered his face with his hand as if to protect it from the fire.

"I can't fire him, Belle," he said wearily. "I've got my reasons. But I'm not afraid of him, if that is what you mean. I'd like the chance to kill him," he added with a spurt of energy. The girl looked at him sadly, then her face brightened with resolve.

"Your new hand thrashed him on Tuesday," she said quietly. "He told you his horse jumped at a rattler in the road and fell over the cliff. That's what he told the rest of the boys. And Marvin hasn't said anything to the contrary, so far."

"What? Slim beat him up? You saw it. How did it happen?"

"Raynor was trying to make love to me. Marvin thought I didn't want him to. He saw me fighting with Raynor, and he interfered."

"Sled, making love to you! The yellow coyote!" Walsh was not wearing a gun, but his hand made an instinctive gesture as he sprang up, his face flaming. He started to stride toward the door while his sister watched him curiously. He stopped, turned, flinging up his arms in an impotent motion.

"Sit down, Joe," she said. "Tell me about it. I've got a right to know. Raynor's got something on you. He almost said as much when he swore I'd marry him before he was through—and be glad to." Her voice carried a contempt she seemed unable to curb entirely. "What is it, Joe?"

Walsh hesitated, standing by the fire, forearm on the mantel, head on it, kicking at a log.

"I heard some things in town today, Joe. That's why I wanted to go, why I wouldn't wait. I'll tell you about them

presently. But tell me about Raynor first. Before he does."

He turned a haggard, careworn face to her.

"I'll tell you, Belle. I've hoped there was some way out. There isn't any. But he'll not marry you. He'll not lay his dirty fingers on you again. The mangy breed!"

"Breed?"

His grandmother was Mexican—or Indian. He's got me in a cleft stick, Belle. He's been bleeding me, but I didn't dream he'd touch you—except as you lost with the steers."

"You think he's mixed up in their being rustled? I've suspected that. That ties him up with the Night Hawks."

"Mebbe. There's people use that name for a mask. He's hinted at it—at the power back of him. Hinted I should join—that I'd have to. It's been raisin' hell with me, Belle. I——"

"Go on, Joe. We'll work it out."

"We can't, unless—but that would leave you in the mess. I've gone over and over it." His fists clenched, opened. He looked like a young man suddenly stricken, grown old.

"We can, Joe, and we will. Even if—we have to go away from here."

She spoke with an effort. Her brother's face lighted, dulled again.

"I'll go with you anywhere, Joe," she said. He flashed her a look of gratitude, of love, but his features were pinched. He nerved himself to an effort.

"You can't go far on the road I may have to travel, Sis. It may lead to the penitentiary. It may— They hang for murder in this state," he ended abruptly.

"Murder!" Her face blanched, her chin quivered, as she caught up her underlip with her teeth in characteristic gesture. "You! I don't believe it." And her chin grew firm as her eyes flashed.

"It was this way, Belle. I don't know so much about it, after all," he went on hurriedly, like a man resolved to a confession and anxious to get through with it. "I had been drinking, of course. I was drunk. It was after the spring roundup—not that that's any excuse. We kept it up late, and Raynor said there was a *fundango* on at a place just outside the town. Said he could take me if I wanted to risk it, but he'd not take any more, because the Mexicans were not over fond of us mingling in with their rackets, and I could talk Spanish. Of course he speaks it like a native.

"They did resent it, though the dance went on. There was one chap who pretended to take offense because I threw a gold piece at the girl who danced. It's the custom, of course, but the gold drew attention. He said a lot of things in Spanish. Raynor told me to swallow them, but the state I was in—we'd been drinking that rotten Pisco, it's like fire in you, gets into your brain—I said something back.

"Sometimes I think it was all planned. I'm almost sure there was dope in my last drink. I can't remember the rest of it. I know the Mexican drew a knife, I can almost swear to that, though Raynor says he didn't. I can remember a shot—" Walsh spoke with frowning brows, striving to conjure something definite out of a hazy memory. "After that—I don't know.

"I was outside, struggling with Raynor who was trying to get me into the saddle. He said I had shot the man and killed him, that my bullet went through his head between the eyes—God!

"The door of the *cantina* opened and a mob came out, howling. We were in the saddle, riding like devils with a pack after us. We got clear, up to the old adobe on the Spanish grant. And we'd lost them. The ride had sobered me—with the thought of what I'd done. Still I couldn't remember drawing my gun or pulling trigger—till I looked at it. Raynor had it. Took it away from me after the shooting. One shell had been fired—only one, but that was enough. It had killed a man."

He rested his head on his crossed arms on the mantel now and his shoulders heaved. The girl went over to him and slid her arm about him, coaxing him back to his chair, sitting on the arm of it. Presently he spoke again in a flat, hopeless voice.

"Raynor seemed decent about it. He said he could fix it, that the man was wanted anyway for smuggling, if not worse. And he did hush it up. I couldn't tell you. I had to get the money. You kept our books. So—that first bunch of steers we lost—I stole my own cattle, Belle, our cattle, God help me.

"Since then Raynor has used his hold over me. He may belong to the Night

Hawk gang, or he may have used that for a cover, but he's taken our steers, connived at it, and he laughs in his sleeve at me. He's threatened covertly. He's even suggested partnership and now—he's dared to think of you. I'll——"

She clung to him, soothing him, telling him she didn't believe that he had committed a crime, that it would all come to light.

"He's got it all written down, witnessed, left with someone who'll use it if anything happens to him. My hands are tied. If I killed him, it would all come out just the same. You'd be disgraced. Belle, I've drunk to forget it, I've shown the yellow streak. I'll never touch another drop, another card. I swear it. But what's the good of that?"

"Leave it to me, Joe. We'll find a way. We'll get at the truth. You didn't kill anyone. If you were drunk, drugged, someone else could have used your gun, or they could have used their own, and then fired a shell from yours to make you think you did it."

He looked at her with the face of a drowning man who has grasped a plank out of the smother. And then he found it only a straw, sinking into despondency.

But the girl was fired with resolution. She communicated some of it to him. "We'll wait, Joe. I can handle Raynor."

"You'll not encourage that snake. I won't stand for it."

"Leave that to me, Joe. We're fighting for your life, for our happiness. Trust a woman's weapons. Raynor wants this ranch. He wants—me. He'll not force the issue when it means losing everything. He may be bluffing. He can't bluff us Joe, we'll not lose out on a bluff."

For a time he sat silent. Then he got up.

"You're the better man of the two, Belle. I'm glad I've told you. I'll do what you say."

She kissed him, clung to him for a little. "What did you hear in town?" he asked.

"It was Wing that started it. Joe, I don't think it's just curiosity on his part, but there is little goes on that that Chinaman doesn't know about—more than one suspects. And Wing has been devoted to



me ever since I nursed him through pneumonia last winter. I really saved his life that night he was delirious. He had stood it up to the last minute of endurance and he would have crept away to his bunk in the cookhouse and said nothing, even if he had died, if his delirium hadn't sent him out in the snow where I saw him from my window.

"People call Chinese eyes inscrutable, but I've seen a lot in his. He came to me yesterday after you had left. It cost him something. He was terribly afraid all the time we were talking—not long. You know how he talks in his pidgin English. 'Missy, something not all right along of you, along Mister Joe. I sabe. You take laundry in town tomorrow. You take along Hop Lee—he my cousin. He belong along same society. You tell him Wing send you. Maybe he tell you something.'"

"Of course the laundry was just an excuse, but it was a good one. I saw Hop Lee. He had been expecting me. And he was frightened, too. Afraid of the Night Hawks, I suppose."

"You sabe Raynor foreman your place?" he said. "You sabe him no good?"



bad. No good along your place. No good along your brother. I heap sabe. No can speak too much. Chinaman get in plenty trouble too much easy. You very good along Wing. That all same good along me. Sabe? Bimeby, maybe you get in heap trouble, I talk along some more. Not now."

"And that was all I could get out of him. He talked laundry and nothing else. Everything was 'no sabe' and his face was just a mask. But his eyes were kind, Joe."

"I don't see where that helps us much."

"Neither do I. Not now. But they were both afraid, and they went out of their way to say something to cheer me up. They don't take risks for nothing. They don't talk for nothing."

"That wasn't all I heard. I had a long, confidential talk with Mrs. Jaynes. You know that Mr. Jaynes and she lived in Mexico City, and that he has always been close to President Diaz. Well, there's trouble in the air. Nearly always is. Porfirio Diaz rules with a heavy hand, and

it is easy for any glib talker and fighter to stir up the peons into a revolution.

"There's one on foot now, and Diaz is letting it grow so that he can get all those who are against him in the ranks of the discontents and then crush them with one blow. His spies know all that is going on. Mrs. Jaynes likes both of us, and I think she guesses that things are not over good with us in a financial way. A Mexican federal agent has seen Mr. Jaynes in regard to negotiations about ammunition and the possible purchase of a gunboat from our government. And—this is where we come in—the federal troops are on the way to the border. They'll make headquarters almost across the river from Caroca, preliminary to swooping down on the rebels. They'll need beef. Jaynes will recommend you. They'll pay top prices for old cows. And they'll pay cash."

"Joe, if we could do that, get Raynor out of the way somewhere. Sell off the stock?"

"Go away? Run away and leave Tres Piños?"

She nodded, her lips firm pressed yet a little tremulous.

"No. I'm not going to run away. You've stiffened me, Sis. I don't think I killed that man. We'll stick. By God, we'll stick! I've told you, and that helps, a heap. But we'll sell that beef, too. We'll have money to fight with. Raynor stealing those steers, with what he might do, has had me nearly crazy. Like taking it from you. You know how slim the bank account is. And a note coming due. I've been gambling, like a fool, to try and make it up."

"We've got to do more than get Raynor out of the way. I can do that by sending him with a shipment on the reservation contract. I meant to go myself, afraid to trust him with the steers or the money. But most of the hands are his choosing. He's made it rotten for the good ones who wouldn't stand for his methods. Weeded 'em out, and I had to accept his reasons. You wondered why I let 'em go."

"That was your end of it, Joe."

"There are a few I can trust. It might be managed. That new chap, Marvin. You don't seem to like him, Belle. Seemed to me you were pretty cool the way he'd acted. Funny Sled stood for him the way he did."

"Sled Raynor won't want him to say anything about what happened at Owl Canyon. It would make his men jeer at him or lose confidence in him, anyway."

He'll ask Marvin to say nothing. And I didn't know that I was going to tell you, Joe; but I had to, to make you tell me—everything. So I—discouraged him."

"I'll say you did. Think he'll keep quiet?"

She nodded, her face away from her brother.

"Mighty fine chap. He'll do to take along. It ain't fair to snub him, because he did you a favor."

There was a curious little smile on the girl's lips before she replied. "There was a minute when I wanted him to kill Raynor, Joe. But he beat him to the draw and he took his gun away and handed it to me. Then he fought him bare-handed. He'd make a good prizefighter, I think. I was afraid his interference would work wrong with Raynor. He'd been hinting things to me, too. They nerved me to talk to you tonight. But he only sulked. I suppose he was thinking up excuses for the boys. It was a wonderful fight, Joe. Marvin can take care of himself."

"By Jings, I believe you do like him after all, Belle!"

The firelight flushed her face; perhaps something else.

"You ought to make it up to him some way, Belle. Him and me are goin' to be pals. You oughtn't to have snubbed him."

"You need a pal, Joe. A man pal. Besides me. And—if I snubbed him," the smile was again on her lips, "it was only for his own good."

"I'll be jinged!" said her brother. "You women are beyond me."

"I'm going to find the right one to travel along with you, some day, Joe."

"Not much. Not while I've got you. Don't you go thinkin' of gittin' married."

"Me?" She laughed and left him, taking up the Night Hawks' receipt, throwing it into the fire. He did not notice that she had not replied to his remark.

"That wasn't quite all I heard today, Joe. They are talking of getting up a crowd of the owners, those who have had cattle stolen, to clean out the Night Hawks. The Cattlemen's Association will finance

it, pay a big reward."

"They won't ask me, if they guess how my steers went," he said grimly. "I can't join 'em the



way things stand."

"You can't refuse them, Joe. But that'll

work out. It's late. I'm going to bed! Good night, Joe."

After she had gone Walsh sat late by the fire. His thoughts were bitter ones, but they strengthened his face. It was moulded into resolve when at last he followed her example.

COLT was purely a technical name for an unbroken horse, as applied to the roan that stood stiff-legged and flat-eared in protest against the rope that held and choked it while Slim reached carefully for the loose end of his single-fire cinch beneath the brute's belly.

The roan was all of four years old, a wise, rangy looking beast, of hammer head that was half concealed by the blindfold. It was sick with rage since the moment it had been driven with the rest of the cavy into the corral, then segregated with others that had managed so far to hold the freedom of the range. It was afraid—afraid of the man smell and the man noise, the whirling rope and tightening noose, and it had fought valiantly, for all its fear. It was far from spent yet, though it had only quivered when Slim gingerly set the saddle on its back. One helper held the rope, high heels dug into the soft dirt of the corral, two others had helped adjust the bridle and the heavy bit. The roan's head was high, too high to be handled. He had suddenly tossed it up from the clutch of the helpers and they waited their chance to get another hold.

The horse had shown all signs of being a twister, and they left the rope on him until the last moment, after the saddle was cinched. Slim had not expected to break horses, and his single cinch was not what he would have chosen for the job, but it would do, rather than borrow another saddle. The roan had quivered when first blanket and then leather had been placed upon his back. After that and the up-swing of his head on a neck of steel, he stood taut, lips drawn back, nostrils wide to show their crimson lining. He was game, and he meant to put up the fight of his life against the servitude of the saddle. Slim had picked the horse as the hardest job of the bunch in hand, meaning to tackle it while he was freshest.

The helpers were plainly anxious of their own minor risks in the performance. They had been turned over to him by Raynor, still surface friendly, but not trusted by Slim. Belle Walsh had been right. Raynor had taken him aside the night before, after supper, while she and her broth-

er talked together in the ranch-house, and suggested that byegones should be byegones.

"I reckon I'd have acted the same way if I was in yore place," the foreman said. "Course you don't know all the circumstances. You're sure quick on the draw, an' handy with yore fists but—I'll put it to you square an' fair: We need a good hand here an', if you stay, you can easy see it wouldn't do me no good with the boys, bein' foreman, to have a yarn like that passed round. You got all the best of it. How about callin' it quits?"

"Suits me," said Slim. And it did, since he had determined to remain and watch the trouble that was brewing at Tres Piños. Raynor's plea was specious. He had undoubtedly accounted for his bruises another way. The best way to get out of it was to make a pact with the new rider, or Slim might destroy much of the bully's prestige.

"Walsh does some of the hirin'," Raynor continued, "but I do the firin'. If you like the job it's all hunky with me fo' you to stay."

"Lies like the clock ticks," Slim told himself. "He's jest about as fair minded as a sheddin' rattler. If he ever gits a good chance to put me away he'll tackle it or git one of his hands to try to."

The men, ropers and riders and the rest, were, he shrewdly suspected, most of them on the ranch because of their sympathies with Raynor. It is not always as easy to tell strains of mixed blood as one might imagine, even by a range rider, where all faces are burned dark by sun and wind and rain. But where Indian blood is strong the eyes are telltales, and it was such a sign that made Slim suspicious that half a dozen at least of the hands had an admixture of blood that came from the south side of the Rio Grande. Raynor amongst them. There were plenty of good Mexicans, plenty of good Indians; it was the mixture of Yaqui and *peon* and degenerate white man, a mixture that never blended and in which vice, like crude oil, was apt to be always on the surface, that Slim Marvin, with others of his kind, had scant use for.

But he said nothing, even when he began to believe that Raynor had not tried to give him the best men for helpers in the breaking corral. Walsh did not appear, but it seemed as if general operations had been suspended to watch the new hand tackle his dangerous job. No buster lasts long. Broken limbs are the least of his troubles. A broken neck may finish him, but rupture is sure to claim him. He may have to sit a horse until the blood comes out of nose and ears and mouth; there is always the chance of a leg smashed against the corral fence by a maddened horse, ribs crushed by a rearing fall, a chest perforated by the steel core of the saddle tree and horn. On the range, busting holds the fascination of a bullfight, and usually the work is done by a traveling professional for high wages.

It looked as if every man on the T. P., except the boss was perched on the top rail, aside from the helpers. Raynor sat astride a chute gate. The Chinese cook peered through the bars. The tall and taciturn Englishman who seemed to attend to all the machinery on the ranch, squatted, with his grasshopper legs and brick-red face atop a hinge pole of the main gate, humped up, smoking a briar pipe.

Interest was usual enough and this attendance might be flattery. It might be lax discipline on the part of Raynor. It might be a special custom—or it might be something else. That Raynor hoped for a spill Slim was certain. There had been few friendly overtures made to the new hand in the bunkhouse overnight. The silent Britisher's attitude had been, after all, the most cordial.

Slim felt the general wish, the almost universal hope that the roan might worst him, but these hostile statics only made his lean face a little grim, and his eyes hard and frosty. He was quite sure of his ability to ride the horse—given fair play.

He caught the swinging cinch with its steel ring, threaded through the latigo strap and drew it taut, while the roan grunted and instinctively blew out against the pressure.

"Git hold of his head," Slim snapped,



his drawl gone in action. "Git that rope off him. Stan' ready to take off that blindfold—an' don't take it off till I give the word."

The helpers got grip on the bridle at cheek straps while Slim set his knee against the roan, watching for the first jump, hauling on the latigo, gaining inch by inch, making his turns. Still the roan stood with only the restless nostrils, the slightly twitching ears and flanks that shivered once in a while, to show that it had any idea of what was going on.

Slim gathered reins and mane into his left hand, close to the withers, facing the saddle. He swung a stirrup toward his foot, but set only enough heft upon it to hold place while his right hand stole up to the horn.

The roan would break out into an equine tornado the moment that blindfold and cheek grips were released, he knew. He had to get into the saddle at lightning speed or counteract a whirl by drawing himself flat to the withers until the jump was ended, and then fling leg over cantle. He put a little weight on the stirrup, the saddle creaked slightly as the roan leaned away and his weight came on the horn. Slowly the roan's back was arching, like a cat's. The rope was off.

"Now!"

The helpers sprang back, raced for the rails, one with the blindfold. Slim and the roan fought the first round in a whirling pillar of dust out of which they emerged with the roan sunfishing like a rodeo untameable, shifting to wild bucking round the corral.

There was no shouted slogan of "Ride him, cowboy," no words of either encouragement or even excitement, though the struggle was dramatic enough—while it lasted. The end came swiftly. The roan threw itself, and Slim took saddle again as it sprang up, foam flying from its bitted jaws, its hide streaked with sweat, eyes wild; rearing, starting a series of prodigious leaps.

At the third of these the cinch broke, and man and saddle went flying through the air to land with a dull smash while the roan went careering, triumphant at having rid itself of the burden it feared would master it. A rope sang and the roan was checked, snubbed to a post, flung to the dirt.

Two or three men, Raynor among them, advanced slowly to where Slim lay with the dust settling down about him. His head was tucked in like a turtle's and for

a moment or two he was motionless. He sensed the silence, his brain working fast to a conclusion of foul play.

The cinch was nearly new, of good manufacture, a woven web that ended in the stout leather through which the ring was reeved. The latigo strap was of sound hide, pliable, well-oiled. He had inspected the saddle the night before to offset the lack of hospitality in the bunk-house. Now he fancied he had better have left the inspection until that morning.

Instinctively, out of long experience, he had fallen on his shoulders and, while the breath was jolted out of him, there was no other damage done. He retrieved his gun which had flown from the holster, went over to the saddle and carefully looked at it.

"Hurt any?" asked Raynor and, to Slim, his voice held disappointment.

Slim did not answer him. He was looking at the latigo. The break—if it were a break—was curious. It was diagonal and, while such a thing was barely possible from a badly cured hide, it looked more like a cut than a tear of fibers, except for the last inch of it. To Slim, someone with a thin blade had sliced slantingly into the leather with careful if diabolical skill, cutting on a long slant two thirds of the way through, and then pasting or gluing it together, working in a little dirt and grease to hide the damage.

On a direct pull it might have lasted for hours. With a ramping, twisting devil like the roan it was a certainty that it would break within a few minutes, as it had, within a few inches of where the strap went under and through the latigo ring.

Slim exhibited it. Since his rage did not call for immediate action without a real target, his southern drawl was pronounced.

"There was nothin' wrong with that latigo lahst night," he said. "I overhauled it myse'f."

Raynor stepped out truculently, backed by the presence of his men.

"You sayin' one of this outfit did that?" he demanded.

His hand hovered above his gun butt, but did not descend. Slim was eyeing him with a look that was cynically suggestive of past humiliation.

"I didn't do it, fo' a fact," said Slim. "An' I suah reckon it's goin' to be hahd fo' me to say who did it. I ain't the kind to go huntin' fo' trouble," he drawled while the lookers-on held their breath to listen.

"but, in case I happen to run into it, I aim to ride it, same's I'm goin' to ride thet roan hawss soon as I fix me a new latigo. I don't believe in showin' off none, but I——"

He stooped, all eyes upon him, and picked up an empty tobacco tin that one of the hands had tossed, empty, to the dirt. It was bright red and it made a brilliant streak as Slim suddenly tossed it into the air. The blued steel of his gun caught the light before fire spurted from the muzzle, and the tin, at the height of its flight, jerked as a bullet tore through it. Twice more Slim hit it in its zigzag fall, once again just before it touched the ground.



"What's thet play fo', if it ain't showin' off?" sneered Raynor.

"Jus' to express my appreciation of a practical joke—if cuttin' thet latigo was a joke. We'll let it go at thet, though there's been too big an audience here this mo'nin' to look jest right to me. There's two ways of bein' popular. I see a bull fight once at Juarez an' the *toro* was the mos' popular thing in the ring. He was there to git killed. I'll call this a joke, unless any hombre wants to announce it ain't. In which case," he added, and his voice rang like the stroke of an anvil, "I got two shells left in my gun."

"What's the matter?" asked Walsh, coming in through the gate that the lanky Englishman had swung open for him. "Anyone hurt?"

"Not yet," said Slim.

The crowd had melted away with the exception of Raynor and the Englishman, tapping out his pipe on his heel.

"My latigo busted," said Slim. "You got a new strap an' a riveter? Thet roan's a likely hawss. I wouldn't wondeh but what there was a little eagle in him somewheres."

"I'll git you a strap," said Raynor and disappeared. Walsh looked uncertainly at Slim, noticed the punctured tin and turned it over with his foot before he threw it out of the corral.

"Thought you might have started a shootin' scrap," he said.

Slim shook his head. "Jest the opposite," he said, and reached into his shirt pocket for the makings. Walsh crossed glances with him for a moment, hesitated

and then offered a match for the quiry Slim completed with one hand. He said nothing, but Slim had read something in his eyes.

"She's told him," he decided. And walked toward the roan, now hitched to the corral fence. It snorted and tried to wheel.

"All right, my son," said Slim. "I ain't goin' to huht you. Jes' make you usef, *caballo*. You an' me are goin' to be friends."

The helpers came back with Raynor and the latigo with which Slim replaced the broken strap.

"I'll keep this fo' a souvenir," he said. "Let's git on with the roan. No need to blindfold him this time. He's part broke already."

He finished his morning's work without audience outside of the imperturbable Englishman, smoking his pipe. In him Slim sensed friendliness. Raynor left, and the helpers did their best. Four colts were turned into the right road for service before the triangle clanged for grub.

After the meal, with most of the hands absent on their various businesses, the Englishman joined Slim as he sat on a bench before starting in again.

"Good show, what?" said the other. "My name's Walters, Marvin. Didn't get a chance to talk to you last night. Turned in early. Had to go over the car after Miss Walsh brought it back. Quite a bit of a job.

"One of those blighters sliced your cinch," he went on. "They'll leave you alone after that shooting. Ripping stunt that. Most of 'em are blighters, y' know, an' Raynor's a blister.

"Mighty glad to have you here. I'm not much myself. Remittance man and a general rotter, but I like to see fair play. What? And I like to see a man score off his own bat. I'm not much on ropin' or ridin'. Never will be, though I've got a good seat, y' know. Couldn't handle anything like that roan. Admire you—immensely. I'm the handy man. If you get what I mean. Fix the dynamo, mend the pump, overhaul the tractor and the old Lizzie. Regular tinker. What? Don't talk much, but want to say this. If you ever need a man at your back I'll try to be there. So long. Got a short circuit to fix. Storm last night. Loafed this mornin'. Wonder Walsh don't kick me off the place. Fact is, Miss Walsh is sorry for me. That's the sort of chap I am, Marvin. The women get sorry for me. God

made them that way. I went the other way. To the devil, old chap."

He stalked off, and Slim watched him with friendly gaze. It was just as well to have someone to depend on at the T. P.—outside of Walsh—and he felt that Walters—if that were his own name—for all his self depreciation, had good stuff in him.

THERE was a difference in the atmosphere of the bunkhouse that night. Not all of it could be attributed to Slim's display with his gun. That, he calculated, would be most likely to affect the men of mixed blood, but, while they treated him with a certain half sullen respect, it was a silent one. After the supper meal they foregathered with Raynor at one end of the table and started playing monte with a pack of greasy cards, noisily enough among themselves. But there were others who nodded at Slim as they came in, while one or two spoke. These, it seemed, were not without their feelings of fair play toward a newcomer who had acquitted himself well. The outfit appeared to be split into two factions, those who blindly regarded Raynor as something more than foreman and those who remained neutral in their regular jobs. Walters, the Englishman, mute most of the time, sat next to Slim, offered him a well read magazine. Slim was no longer an entire outsider. Two hands had gone to town in the afternoon, and these he had considered as Raynor's immediate followers.

The fifteen stolen steers still bothered Slim, though he fancied he now remembered the man who had been called Chief. A vague memory of a voice across the poker table where he had spilled his check grew stronger, but he still felt that Raynor had something to do with the deal. The steers had been placed in home pasture by Raynor preparatory to shipping, part of a car that was being made up. He had had the choice of place and he had neglected to place a night herd, ordinarily not necessary within wire, but, with the rumors of rustling that were about and had even reached Slim's ears in the next county, it would have been a wise precaution. Then there had been Raynor's almost insolent reply to Walsh, the foreman's swaggering attitude generally. Slim kept his ears open to the general talk while he turned the pages of his magazine, reading automatically. Sometimes the page was obscured by a phantasmal illustration, nothing at all to do with the story, a picture of Belle Walsh's face, always with a

sentence whispered in the back of his brain—"She told him about the fight after all."

Slim was far from a fool. It was plain enough, putting things together, that Raynor had some hold over Walsh, and that explained the reluctance of the girl to have Slim interfere. She knew of that hold, or suspected it. He had been her champion once and he stood charged to help her again; but not to make a mess of things, to bring matters to an untimely head by being precipitant. Slim decided that what he needed now was the combination of a cool head, good ears and a quiet tongue.

He had an idea that he had another friend outside the bunkhouse in Wing, the presiding genius of the mess-hall. More than once he had noticed the genial Chinaman regarding him with eyes that were distinctly approving. The cook might appreciate the scene in the corral, but Slim did not analyze the reason for the friendship. It might never come to more than an extra slice of apple pie, perhaps one for Pete, an inveterate equine lover of sweets. Nevertheless it seemed worth having.

There was some jesting with the foreman that struck Slim as not altogether void of sarcasm, though it might be ordinary bunkhouse jealousy of Raynor's privileges.

"Mighty nice of you to spend an evenin' with us," said one. "We don't often see so much of you. Ain't you goin' over to the Big House ternight?"



"I'm shy of *dinero*," retorted Raynor. "I'm takin' up a collection. You want to jine in?"

"I ain't much on Mexican games," said the other, and by the tone of his voice Slim had little doubt that this man, at least, resented a little the probability, if not the fact, that he was working on an equality with men of mingled breed. Slim went on reading, listening. The gamblers' voices rose and fell. Raynor seemed to be winning on the turns of the cards. The four men at Slim's end of the table began to talk in comparatively low tones, but he heard them distinctly, though they apparently took it for granted that he was absorbed in his magazine. Walters, behind a cloud of smoke set out his cards at Canfield.

"Wonder if they's anything straight about this revolution?"

"Revolution, nothing. They don't call 'em revolutions across the river. They call 'em *demonstrations*. They have to happen every so often. Old Porfirio holds 'em checked up so hard they're bound to buck.

"I mighty nigh got demonstrated agin' a wall one time. They kin call 'em what they durn please, but I'm tellin' you they spill blood an' fire when they git goin'."

"That's the time you want to watch out fo' a Spigotty."

"That's South American *wah-wah*. Greaser."

One of them looked a little apprehensively toward the other end of the table.

"To blazes with them!" said the speaker. "Spigotty, dago or greaser. You can't trust none of 'em."

"You're dead wrong there. Jest as good as any folks. 'Cept the breeds."

They agreed on that and Slim felt better. If there ever came a time when issue was taken against Raynor there would be more than one or two against his crowd. Six, counting Walters, not counting Wing.

"Probably git some news from town when the boys git back."

"I ain't goin' to wait up ha'f the night to git it."

"Hear that rumor about the Cattlemen's Association?"

"What?" The voices dropped lower still. Slim believed the precaution taken more against the monte players than himself. He could still hear fairly well in scraps when Raynor and his crowd did not make too much noise.

He heard bits about the Night Hawks, about a big reward, a vigilante organization. And, piecing them together, he drew a right conclusion. He arrived also at a pretty definite conclusion that whatever there was of inside crooked work in the stealing of T. P. cattle, these four men were neither in on it, nor were they members of the more or less mysterious Night Hawks.

There was a near row at the table end. It was curious that none of the men he fancied as breeds had other than eminently American names, but the admixture might be slight, and it was not at all uncommon for half breeds to take surnames that suggested Saxon blood, whether legally or not. Raynor threatened one of Slim's helpers, called Taylor, snatching his cards from him. Taylor flourished a knife that seemed to come out of his sleeve, but dropped it as the muzzle of Raynor's gun came above the edge of the table.

"If I didn't need you," Raynor snarled, "I'd shoot the lungs out of you."

The other mumbled something and Raynor shot a quick look down the table as if realizing that he had said something imprudent. He saw nothing that did not reassure him, and the incident passed.

Slim was genuinely tired with his day. He turned in early and soon Walters crawled into the bunk beneath him. One after another followed. The card game continued until someone expostulated loudly and forcibly from a bunk. Raynor went outside after turning down the lamp, but those who had played with him sat round the stove where wood was burning slowly under balanced drafts. Slim, half asleep, felt the cold breeze as Raynor came in again with the two who had gone to town. It was late, he knew, by the shift of moonbeams on the wall. The lamp was out now, all had gone to bunk but these three, and the room echoed with the varied snoring of the slumbering hands.

Raynor was talking in a low tone, using Spanish. Slim listened in, glad of his working knowledge of that tongue. He guessed the conversation the end of more vital matters discussed outside, but it was interesting enough, if only for the corroboration of his idea about the foreman, unmasked in his fluency.

"They might as well offer fifty thousand as ten," said Raynor. "No one will ever collect it."

"I'm not so sure of that. *Dios*, ten thousand American pesos is a big sum!"

"You thinking of going in for it?" came in Raynor's voice.

"Me? Heart of the Virgin, no!"

"Then keep watch on your tongue or you may lose it. A dog may eat it."

There was silence, the scuffling of men undressing in the dark, creaking of bunks, and silence. Slim did not go to sleep again that night. Ten thousand dollars was a lot of money. One might buy a good outfit with half that amount. Even aspire to think of marrying—someone with property rights of her own, for instance. And, if the collection included the elimination of Raynor? *Bueno muy bueno*.

The Englishman surprised Slim the next morning, finding a chance to talk apart.

"Hear those two chaps who went to town come in last night, with Raynor?"

"Yes. You awake?"

"Don't sleep much. Thought you might not be snoozing either. Your breathing was mighty easy over me. Hear what they said? Understand it?"

"Yes. You *habla Español*?"

"Yes. Not saying so round here. Rot-ten work going on in this county, Marvin. Some of it slops over on this ranch. Can't understand it all. Don't need to. They're rooking Walsh, and he's a decent sort. Sister is—well, she's sorry for me, let it go at that. I'm more or less of a rotter, but I draw the line at stealing—what? You're straight as a bit of string. Raynor's crooked as a hound's hind leg. Willing to wager his right name's more like Herrera. I've heard odds and ends, nights, when I'm awake, going over the bally mess I've made of things.

"Well, you heard 'em. These black-guards stealing cattle all over the shop call themselves the Night Hawks. No one knows who belongs. Getting afraid to talk about it. Now the Cattlemen's Association are after them. And it looks as if our little pal Raynor might be one of the bally ringleaders. Seemed to be afraid a bit. What? Thought the other party might squeal. Ten thousand's a nice little parcel of spondulix.

"You and I, now, suppose we get a rumble about something? Land our man. More with him, maybe. What say if we go halves on what we collect? Both work together. I'm not quite the ass I look and almost anyone would look silly beside you and your gun. What price us, old scout?"

Slim could see that Walters had intended to let him in on the overhead talk, even if Slim had not chanced to know Spanish, and he warmed to the Britisher. Whether



they would be able to trap Raynor and, through him, the heads of the Night Hawks, was another matter. But it was worth trying, and he reflected that he had more than a suspicion he knew the man called "Chief."

He nodded.

"You're on, old chap? Righto."

IT WAS Sunday morning and the outfit lounging generally. Some had gone to town, but most of them loafed, mending leather or clothing, cleaning guns, skylarking. Walsh was in Caroca, trying to make final contract for the sale of beef to the Mexican federal forces who were now camped close to the border. He had kept this quiet. Not even Raynor

suspected the possibility of such a deal.

The T. P. riders gaped when a roadster came down the lane from the gate that opened on the main road. There was a vision driving, alone, and most of them knew the lady, at least by sight. La Rose, in summer costume, stunning to their eyes, though her complexion, like her costume, was a trifle pronounced.

Slim, shaving meticulously by a mirror hung to a nail outside the bunkhouse door, saw her reflection and promptly drifted inside. He did not think she would be especially eager to see him, and his action was natural enough. The car slowed by the gate of the garden, then came on. La Rose liked the flowers but suspected the reason for their existence. It was only on the way out that she remembered talk of Walsh's sister, and she had almost turned back. She had seen nothing of Walsh on the road or in Caroca. But she hesitated to call at the house, and drove on to where the men rose as one from the bench and off the top rail of the opposite fence, glad that, from sheer custom, they had on their glad shirts. Those who had sombreros swept them off gallantly as she surveyed them with a smile. Walters stepped forward.

His manner evidently impressed her as a brand of politeness not common to the neighborhood.

"I've never seen you at the Cactus, have I?" she asked, her eyes roving for sight of Walsh, or Raynor or Slim. She was still vindictive, but Walters, with his unaffected gentility, checked her a little. He was a distinct type. As a string to her bow he might be efficient. And she was a little afraid of him.

"I didn't know I'd find you there," he said, and got a dazzling smile for reward. "My error. Can I serve you?"

She was not quite sure whether he was mocking her or not with his melancholy eyes. Here was a man who had seen life. Remittance man, of course. But apparently working. A phenomenon. A puzzle that intrigued her—a little. She made up her mind to see more of him.

"I'm looking for Mr. Walsh," she said. "I rather think he expects me."

She raised her voice, which was well modulated, hoping that Raynor might be within hearing, knowing that some of these men considered her more or less the foreman's girl, sufficiently so not to try to mine his claim. The long Englishman with his horse-face, was different. She

rather thought he'd cut in on Raynor if she tried to make him. Slim dropped out of her mind. The man called Taylor went in search of Raynor, currying favor, and found him looking at a wirecut on his horse.

"Johnny Bull's trying to steal yore gel," he said.

Raynor looked at him in surprise. "What's eatin' you?" he asked. "What gal?"

"La Rose. She's here in her John Henry. Come out to see Walsh, she says. Ses he was expectin' her."

"That's a damn lie." Raynor hurried off. La Rose called to him gaily. She was chagrined at the news of Walsh's absence, but she was not going to spoil her day. Raynor was the next best bet. To pit him against the Britisher might be better fun than the cowboy whose name she did not know. She considered Slim as dumb where women were concerned, anyway. He didn't matter so much with better game in hand.

Walters knew by bunkhouse gossip of Raynor's leaning. He was shrewd enough to debit La Rose with her desire for flirting and its complications. He had not trailed the world without acquiring wisdom. And he turned away, despite her alluring glance. Raynor caught it and his face grew darker. This was his girl. He did not relish interference and the word of Walsh rankled.

"Thought you weren't comin'," he began. "You're late."

La Rose gave him an admiring glance, gasping a little at his cleverness. She let him help her from the car, draw her away from the crowd.

"What's this about Walsh? Trying to start somethin' you can't finish?"

"You've no strings on me, Sled Raynor. You're hurting my arm."

"I'll twist it off if you try to make a fool out of me. Rollin' yore eyes at that British dude."

"He's a gentleman, anyway."

"Well I'm not. As for that dude, I'll spoil him if he monkeys round you. Now then, what about Walsh?"

"He invited me out here."

"I don't believe it. If he did, why ain't he here to meet you?"

He had let go her wrist and La Rose was beginning to enjoy herself.

"I didn't set any special date."

Raynor's face began to twitch. "I'll tell him where he heads in. You, too. You lay off Walsh."

"Since when did you give me orders?"

"I'm givin' 'em to you now. You came out here to see me, sabe? We'll take a ride together in the car of yours, back on the mesa. I'll git the Chink to put up some lunch."

This did not suit La Rose. Things were not going as she planned. Raynor was asserting his masterful manner, and she felt something of the old lure of it.

"I'm not going," she said. "If Walsh isn't home I'll call on his sister."

That was bravado, but Raynor's coarse guffaw stung her pride and unleashed her temper.

"Think she'd have anything to do with yore sort?" Raynor sneered.

La Rose, in a fury, slapped him across the cheek. Her jeweled ring struck the lip that Slim had split and which was barely beginning to heal. Blood spurted and, as La Rose started back, alarmed at the result of her blow but still angry, Raynor started for her. But he checked himself, pressing the loose ends of his neckerchief to the cut.

"I'll fix you fo' that, you hellcat!" he said. There were flakes of fire in his dark eyes and his voice was low and deadly. The girl shrank further off, watching his clutching hands, suddenly afraid.

"You'll leave me alone. I'm through with you," she panted, forgetful of the cowboys, a dozen paces away, watching them.

"I'm not through with you."

"I know too much about you, Sled Raynor," she said, and her voice grew shrill with terror.

"Yah! what you know!" He stood in front of her, covering her from the little crowd in the front rank of which stood Walters, his left hand stroking his gaunt chin, his lank figure seeming slack, though there was a light in his too often vacuous eyes. La Rose backed against the fence of the corral, at bay. Raynor had boasted to her that the hands at Tres Piños were his tools and, with Walsh away, she became panicky. Womanlike, she seized any weapon.

"We've got a new dancer at the Cactus," she said. "She's made friends with me. Calls herself La Paloma. She knows you."

La Rose had made no definite threat; it was probably that she suspected more than she knew, but Raynor's face turned to that of a devil as he heard the name of the girl who called herself the Dove. Far from a dove was Teresa Hernandez. A

hawk, too wild even for Raynor to tame. It was she who had danced at the *cantina* the night Raynor had dragged Walsh away after the quarrel and the shooting.

"I'll slit your throat before it cackles too much," he said, his eyes bloodshot, murderous. "And La Paloma's afterwards."

She believed him, for all the sunny day and the onlooking cowboys. It all swam before her eyes a little.

"You'll swing for it," she gasped as Raynor made motion toward his belt, the devil inside of him rejoicing at sight of the frightened woman who stared at him in genuine horror. Neither of them noticed Walters strolling toward them. He'd scare her into line, thought Raynor; flash the knife on her. He drew it halfway from its sheath at his belt, then sent it back as La Rose cowered.

"I'll do better than that," he said grimly. "I'll send in yore name to the Night Hawks, my lady. They won't slit that pretty throat of yores, mebbe, but they'll do worse than that. You won't want to call yoreself La Rose after they git through with you."

She blanched under her rouge at the name of the masked riders of the night.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned as Raynor grinned at her.

"Rotten bad form to frighten a lady, Raynor, what?"

Walters wore no weapon. His hands dangled low at his sides. There was a flame in his light blue eyes that held Raynor for a moment before he stepped back, crouching at the hips, his bruised face cruel, his hand darting to his gun.

"You damned dude!" he said, and La Rose shrieked.

It was Raynor's love of making a man cringe when he had the drop on him that saved Walters. The Englishman stood his ground as the foreman's gun came out of its holster and he let the muzzle nose its slow and deadly way upward. On the cry, Slim, his face clear of lather, his dressing finished, sensing the note of distress, sprang through the door of the bunkhouse, Colt in hand, taking in the situation as the cowboys stirred, the whole action swift as the turning of a hand.

"Raynor!"

The foreman half turned. He had Walters covered anyway, and there was an imperative accent to the calling of his name that warned him. He saw the glint of blued steel in the hand of the new hand. There were thirty yards between them, but

fear laid a hand on his shoulder and his pulses slowed. In that instant Walters



deftly kicked the gun out of his hand. It went flying over the bars into the corral. The Englishman offered his arm in courtly fashion to the girl and she took it, glad of the support, as he strolled off with her. Raynor was left with distorted face, convulsed with rage, humiliated, conscious of the menace of the gun in Slim's steady hand, of Slim's watchful gaze.

Then the weapon was holstered, and Raynor strode up to Slim, fists clenched.

"Damn you!" he spluttered. "You're fired. I'll give you yore time. Git yore hawss an' fog out of here, pronto. The dude goes, too."

Slim laughed quietly. "I wouldn't think of leavin' till yore eye gits well," he said softly. The words braked Raynor's fury. "Makes you look so't of one-sided," Slim went on, his head on one side as if he contemplated whether it would not be a righteous deed to restore balance by a second attack. "Man who hires me fires me," he drawled. "That's a rule of mine. I reckon Walters feels the same way erbout it."

"Walters'll have to wait till Walsh makes him out a check," said Raynor. "The two of you can go together." It was a lame way out of it, but better than none. Slim had worsted him. Walters and La Rose were walking toward the flower garden. Belle Walsh stood on the porch surveying them curiously. She had vaguely heard the shriek, from the back of the house where she had been in conference with Wing over culinary matters.

Raynor wheeled, lunged into a lane between two corrals. He entered one, retrieved his gun, saddled and mounted his horse and rode off toward Caroca, presumably to meet Walsh and ensure the discharge of the two hands.

Slim went back into the bunkhouse. He was still clear of La Rose, content that Walters had taken her off, though he did not suppose that the girl would want to have anything more to do with him. He had brought matters to a climax that might

lose him his job. That did not worry him so much as the thought that his usefulness might be destroyed in aiding Walsh and his sister. It all depended upon how strong a hold the foreman possessed over his employer. Walsh would be loath to lose him, he felt certain. And Walters was a man hard to replace, with his knack with engines.

It would all be settled when Walsh got back from town. It was no use borrowing trouble, and Slim did not see how else he could have acted. Therefore he shrugged his shoulders and, gazing through a side window, saw a scene that rather staggered him. Belle Walsh was coming down the path to the gate. Walters, imperturbable, was halting to greet her, La Rose hanging back, uncertain of her reception.

The Englishman had secured the dancer's right name—and that was curious in itself, for no one else in Caroca knew it.

"Miss Walsh, will you permit me to introduce to you Miss Margaret Baker?" he said. The words were carefully chosen, and the emphasis as carefully placed. It neither offended La Rose nor deceived Belle Walsh. She looked a little searchingly at Walters and then at Margaret Baker. She took in the rouge, the gown, the perfume and, since she was far from a fool, it is probable that she placed the dance-hall attraction with fair accuracy. Perhaps she saw more than most people did. Perhaps La Rose showed a diffidence, an appeal, that was half shrinking rather than her usual defiance. The soul of the innocent girl in her gingham gown may have caught a glimpse of the soul of the other that showed an aspect unknown to her little world. It had not been all pretence when she had told Walsh she wanted to get out of it all.

And, besides; Walters was a favorite. Belle relied on his discretion in such matters. She was not narrow minded.

"I am glad to meet you, Miss Baker," she said. "Won't you and Mr. Walters come up to the house and have some ice cream? Wing's made some and it's pleasant on the porch."

La Rose went up between the flowers with her eyes moist, to the danger of their make-up. She was subdued and gentle and the hostess did most of the talking. She did not ask her guest what she was doing in Caroca, but she did find out where she came from, and soon the two were talking about gardens, with Walters, stroking his chin, between them. It was a curious conclave.

"I thought something had happened," Belle Walsh said once. "It sounded like a shriek, and that brought me out. It was fortunate I did, and saw you."

"Shriek of laughter, I rather think," said Walters. "Raynor was really humorous. Had to be for me to see the joke, don't you know?"

When La Rose left her voice shook a little. "I'm not fixed so's I can entertain you," she said, "but if I see any way of getting even, I'll grab it.

"She's just about an angel," she told Walters as they latched the gate, while wondering cowboys whispered and whistled softly.

These demonstrations ceased as the Englishman came up with the girl on his arm. They had seen a touch of his quality. And to cross him meant crossing Slim Marvin, still inside. Walters, unconscious of any hitches, told La Rose that he wanted her to meet his friend.

"Saved me from sudden death and all that, when Raynor started trouble," he said, and called Slim's name aloud, presenting him as Mr. Marvin. There was no enmity now in the eyes or the heart of La Rose. True hospitality had almost wrought a miracle.

"I'm glad to know your name," she said to Slim. "I saw you call the turn on Raynor."

Slim begged her not to mention it, while Walters slipped inside and came out buckling a gun belt about his waist.

"I'm going into town with you," he said to La Rose.

"How will you get back?"

"The Old Man has the car," he said. "He said he'd not likely be coming back till late. I'll find him. And you might run into Raynor."

She knew he meant Walsh by the ranch term of Old Man. And she hoped they would not meet him on the way. Things had changed since morning. As for Raynor—the fear of his threat was still upon her, though she had tried to shake it off. She knew its possibilities.

"If Raynor meets us?" she prefaced. "He's got it in for you."

"I know one end of a gun from the other," Walters answered laconically, and the girl felt confidence in his ability to take care of himself. He had placed himself in jeopardy for her sake greater than he would generally risk, she fancied. At least she hoped it was for her sake. Not just because she was a woman. "I heard what Raynor was saying to you as I came

up," Walters went on. "Don't you bother too much about that. A whole lot of that Night Hawk palaver means nothing."

"You don't know," she said.

"Know quite a lot. They've rather shot their bolt, y' know. Cattlemen's Association after them and all that sort of thing. Don't you worry."

"I won't, if you tell me not to." She said it simply, without coquetry. "I don't know what Joe Walsh will think of me having visited his sister. He'll be furious."

"Why?"

"I imagine you can guess if you want to try. I'm not her sort. You know what I do for a living."

"Dance your feet off. Look here, Miss Baker, I'm glad to say that Miss Walsh is a friend of mine. I'm a bad egg and she knows it. I try not to be a cad, but I'm a long way from being a saint. A sight further off than you are."

"You're a man."

"There's jolly well no difference. Woman gets the worst of it, that's all. And I'm mighty glad that you are a woman, by Jove, I am! A friend of mine is a friend of Miss Belle's, or I wouldn't have introduced you."

"You mean you really want to be a friend of mine?"

"We'll start at that." She looked at him with the searching glance of a woman often deceived, but he met it imperturbably, with a little nod that warmed her.

WALSH came back from Caroca, Walters with him in the car, triumphant. Thanks to Jaynes, he had been in touch with an empowered member of Diaz's staff and laid plans for a highly satisfactory deal. He was sure now of selling his excess beef at a good price. The Mexican federal troops were coming up close to the line at a point almost opposite Caroca. A tentative price and quantity had been discussed. He could get rid of all his grade stock and financially shelve his worries. Without the ancient prejudice and grudges of the oldtime ranchers and cattlemen, Walsh knew that the word of a Mexican gentleman was a bond, and the officer he had spoken with was of *hidalgo* blood.

He was able to throw off his worry about Raynor to a great extent. The foreman had found him, demanding the discharge of Walters and Slim, and Walsh had effectively denied him.

"No time to talk about such nonsense,

Sled. I've got a big deal on hand. Need every hand I've got. Let it blow over. I



want you to deliver the stock to the reservation. I'll be busy while you're gone. It'll all be forgotten by the

time you get back."

Raynor's eyes narrowed. He'd deliver the steers and collect the money. Whether he'd turn it over to Walsh or not, he was not so sure. He did not like Walsh's manner. It was a little too confident. He seemed to be getting out of hand. But he said nothing more about firing Slim or Walters. When he had seen Walsh and the Englishman leave town he got busy in quarters that he knew as excellent sources of information, seeking to find out what Walsh meant by his big deal. What he learned caused him to grin complacently as he began to lay his plans. He, too, would have to be busy before he started for the reservation, so busy that he was willing to leave La Rose alone for the time being. He would take with him his own special crowd from the hands at Tres Piños. What he had to say to them after they got away would quite restore his prestige. It was late when he got back to the ranch. The next day he greeted Slim and Walters with a surly nod.

Walsh, telling the news to Belle, paid scant attention at the time to what she said about her guest. After she had gone to bed, however, he whistled softly and resolved to keep his peace. If Walters were really taken with La Rose his own little entanglement was over with. She was not a bad sort, he told himself. And Walters knew his own affairs best.

All he had to do was to time things properly. It would take Raynor all of ten days to go to the reservation and back. Ample time in which to round up, deliver, and collect spot cash for the Diaz contract, once that was signed. And he had leeway on the reservation delivery. Raynor would lay no hands on the Mexican pesos. He began, in his new found confidence, to almost believe that Raynor had been bluffing him. As soon as he had money in the bank he meant to start some inquiries about the man he had killed. With money he could employ the right people to find out the exact truth of the affair.

The reservation steers were rounded up, and Raynor departed. Apparently the

foreman knew nothing of the projected sale to the Mexican commissary, and Walsh breathed a sigh of relief.

He summoned Slim to the ranch-house the night that Raynor left and told him of the deal.

"I'm making you acting foreman, Slim," he said. "Your salary goes up to ninety. May stay there. You don't know the place yet, but Harper does and he'll tell you where the stock is ranging. Three hundred head, including cows, at sixty dollars straight. War prices. Start rounding up tomorrow. We've a week to deliver. I can get some drivers later. We'll hold 'em in what we call Little Park, inside the wire. Don't have to cross the river. They'll take 'em over on this side. I'll go with you, of course."

Here was a different Walsh from the man Slim had first met, forceful and sure of himself. Slim rejoiced, not only for the sake of his new made friend, but on his sister's account.

She met him at supper and her mood was gracious.

"I've got a delayed acknowledgment to make to you, Mr. Marvin," she said.

"Oh, call him Slim," broke in her brother.

She hesitated, flushed a little, then did as she was asked, and the sound of his nickname on her lips was music to its owner.

"It's an apology as well," she went on. "I've told my brother about what happened in Owl Canyon. There were reasons for the way I behaved. Some day Joe will tell you about that, I hope. You must have thought me very rude. I'll try and make amends. Joe says you are to be acting foreman. You'll take your meals with us, of course, as many as you can, and come over evenings."

Here was heaven for Slim, striving to say the right thing and getting tongue-tied. She laughed at him, and after supper sang and played for both of them. She asked him if he knew any of the Spanish *canciones*, and Slim took his courage in both hands.

"I can't sing," he said. "No more'n a crow. But mebbe you know this one? He spoke the lines in Spanish, and Walsh snickered softly.

"I can't speak Spanish, much less sing it," said the girl. "But I've got a translation of that. It ought to have a guitar accompaniment, but I'll do the best I can." She played a few chords and began to sing:

Eyes like stars that shine so bright
In the azure depths of night;
Voice that thrills like song of lark.
Breath as sweet as breeze that blows
O'er the jasmine and the rose
'Twixt the twilight and the dark.

Slim wondered if she were a little self-conscious as she sang. He hoped so, but it was hard to tell in the half light where she sat. The song seemed at once to bring them nearer and to separate them. He was only a rough rider, schooled well enough, but better versed of late in the crude ways of the bunkhouse and mess-hall, the free and easy life of the range, than in places like this room with its symbols of refinement. Walsh was not very different from him, he comforted himself, but Walsh was an owner and Slim only a cowboy.

Yet he found himself at ease finally, after the singing was done and Walsh busy at letters and accounts. She got him talking of hunting and fishing and showed herself as no novice at either. She loved the open; saddle and rod and gun, blanket and slicker and campfire, she knew them all.

He went back to the bunkhouse walking on air, building castles in the same unstable medium. And he was up at dawn, flinging himself into the work. Raynor and the Night Hawks were forgotten in the task at hand.

Followed glorious, crisp mornings with the steaks broiling and the coffee simmering, potatoes frying, biscuits in the camp oven, Walters installed as cook for the little outfit. Swift riding after the scattered bunches of barren grade cows, culling the steers, shouting across arroyos as the stock plunged to escape the roundup, and the ponies slid down on their tails or climbed like goats, as keen for the work as their riders.

And always, early, Belle Walsh, loping



out from the ranch, doing her share on a wise old cowpony, almost as good as a man, staying till sundown, going back to

the ranch again with a cheery wave of hand that Slim came to think was meant for him more than the rest.

She was more than making amends. He felt sure of that sometimes. She found opportunity to be with him through the

day, and there were glances besides the hand waving when they parted.

Then Walters served the savory supper, and afterward told them in his jerky, effective way, many tales by land and sea, adventures credited always to someone else, but which Slim guessed were largely personal experiences. So to bed, tarp on the ground, blankets over and boots in with the owner to save frozen wrinkles in the morning. Sometimes Walsh stayed out with them. Two nights of the five he went home with his sister to be near the telephone.

All slept like logs, unmoving, but Slim dreamed, and in his dreams his difficulties vanished and he became an ardent wooer, a faculty that left him utterly undaring when daylight came, and Belle came loping over the rise after breakfast. But he thought that she knew how he felt, and perhaps understood why he hesitated to be more bold.

By noon of the sixth day the full shipment was assembled in Little Park, a bowl in the breakdown of the mesa with a spring in the center and good feed between the sage and mesquite clumps. They were inside wire, but Slim ordered night herd. The day was sultry, the sunrise had broken through in murky crimson and saffron and he did not like the look of the weather. He remembered the day of his arrival, the three pines standing out against the big cloud, the center one blasted, looking like a great gallows, and the downpour that followed.

The stock was to rest quietly till the next day, set for delivery. Slim was responsible, and he took no chances.

"Storm may set 'em millin', if it comes after nightfall," he said. "There's enough of 'em to stampede, and I've seen less break plumb through three strand. Five wouldn't hold 'em. And we don't want to lose 'em the way other stock's been lost off this ranch. We'll split the night herd."

He was quite sure of the men under him. They were good hands, content with their wages and their jobs, and now beyond any possible influence from Raynor, if they had ever been susceptible, which he doubted. He supposed he would have to give up his authority when Raynor came back, but he was not sure of that. Walsh had meant something when he said his foreman's wage might be continued, and he had done well. He knew that aside from Walsh's commendations.

Storm masses assembled, seemed to dis-

solve all through the morning, and soon after noon the weather grew more ominous. Dark, slaty vapors piled up back of the mesa, the cattle were uneasy at their grazing, there was no air stirring, and every move of the men brought sweat from their skins. There was little to do, but he held them all for the night watch. Even Walters, who rode well enough. Walsh left before supper, approving Slim's plans, leaving them in his charge.

"I've got some phoning to do in winding up the business," he said. "Report things in good shape, for one thing, thanks to you. You won't stay a hand long, Slim, you know how to manage."

Belle Walsh had not come out. The Mexican commissary colonel, with one or two companions, were to come out to the ranch to inspect and pay over the money, and she had plans to attend to for their entertainment.

"Be sure to be on hand, Slim," Walsh said as he left. "Need you to help talk to 'em. I can't do it all, and you know the lingo."

"So does Walters. How about him?"

"Sure. Might have known he'd talk Mexican. Never says much, that hombre, but he knows a heap. Both of you show at lunch. Harper can run things out here till inspection."

"It did not cool off at nightfall as usual. There was a mist over half the sky, and no stars visible. A moon was due around midnight, but Slim did not think they would see much of it. The air seemed heavy, compressed under the sheer weight of the black cloud mountains behind the mesa, over it now, with streaks of lightning flickering through the mass, and now and then a low rumble of thunder.

"She'll be more'n jest a cloudburst," said Harper. "When she comes we'll be swimmin' herd stead of ridin'. Yes, sir, we'll be duckfooted befo' mornin'. Who goes on first?"

"We'll shoot for it," said Slim, and the dice were rolled on a blanket by the light of the fire. Walters had got a pile of wood, enough for the night, an extra tarpaulin to keep it dry, though Harper vowed it would float off once the storm broke.

"I know 'em when they come this time of year," he said. "Reg'lar Noah's Ark floods. Think they was a lake over you an' someone pulled a slide out of the bottom.

Two men mounted and rode round the dark mass of the herd. The sound of

their crooning, melancholy songs came to the others, a word or two of the Cowboy's Lament:

"Oh, as I walked down the streets of Laredo,
As I walked there in Laredo one day!"

Tobacco glowed save where Harper softly mouthed his harmonica, the fire burned sluggishly as if lacking oxygen and the clouds imperceptibly moved eastward, a pall above them, shifting in a wind that was screened by the vapory bulk.

"I got a hunch," said Harper as he tucked his harmonica away. "I sure got a hunch this is a hoodoo night. You heed me, hombres, there's goin' to be trouble at Tres Piños befo' mornin'. I felt this way befo'. Once was the night I went an' got married, an' another time we got mixed in with some rustlers an' rode the leather off'n our saddles fo' we got clear. 'Nother time——"

"Thar's frogs down in the spring to do the croakin'," said the man next to him lamconically. "Go down an' jine 'em, cowboy."

"Trouble at Tres Piños!" The phrase stayed in the front of Slim's mind. He had used it himself, and now it came with a premonition he set down to the weather and his own nervousness in handling the cattle through the night.

The two riders were walking their horses round and round the herd that stood unfeeding, snuffing, snorting and occasionally pawing at the ground.

Harper, not to be balked, delighting in his own chronic pessimism, started a new subject.

"Fine weather for the Night Hawks," he said. "If they got wind we had this herd here all ready to stampede, they'd save the storm the trouble. Drive 'em over the line an' sell 'em to the greasers. They'd buy. Price 'ud likely be better than a regular deal."

"What would we be doin'?"

"Shootin' off our li'l guns, one bullet to every fifty agen us. It's a Night Hawk night, I'm tellin' you."

Slim shifted uneasily. The possibility was not too remote. He knew the deal had been kept quiet, but there was no telling where it might have leaked. None knew the sources of information of the Night Hawks. It was said that there was at least one active member on every outfit.

"Jolly rum thing happened once down in the South Seas," said Walters as he

made his pipe draw to his satisfaction. "In the New Hebrides, at a place called Aoba. Called the Traders' Graveyard, too. Only there were no graves. The natives who killed 'em buried 'em in their bellies. There was a copra planter by the name of Heywards——"

Silently Slim blessed the Englishman as the rest craned to listen to the yarn. There was no sense talking about the Night Hawks. That sort of thing made for bad shooting if anything should happen. They would listen to Walters all night with his talk of pearlsh and poachers, cannibals and wizards, club houses lined with skulls, and grisly tales of idol drums beating up for head hunting raids.

A few heavy drops fell, spitting in the fire, ceased. The gloom seemed to deepen. A livid tongue of flame that lapped the forward edge of the cloud showed it far advanced. When the rain came they would be in the middle of it. They dragged their slickers to them and put them on, while Walters yarned on.

THREE men came out in a car to Tres Piños that night, late, just before Walsh was ready to go to bed, well satisfied with the way everything was going. Belle had sat up with him. Walsh had been uneasy at the gathering storm, consulting the ranch barometer that gave an ominous reading.

"I think I ought to go out to Little Park," he said.

"Why? Slim can do everything, can't he?"

"He surely can. Mighty good man. Too good to be a hand."

"I don't think he will be long."

"That's what I told him myself. Like him, Sis?"

He asked the question without special meaning and stared as he saw a swift blush sweep over the girl's neck and face. But she did not hide her head or turn away. She nodded at him, conscious of her teltale banner of rose.

"By Jings!" he said softly. "Like that, is it? Couldn't suit me any better, Belle. I'd pick him fo' a brother-in-law without hesitatin'. He'll do to take along. But, dern his hide, he'll have to stay here at Tres Piños. I'll be Jinged I lose you fo' housekeeper. Two men won't be much more trouble'n one, will they?"

"You're a bit premature, Joe," she answered him more comedly.

"Ain't spoken yet? He will. I've seen it in his eye. Saw it the night you sang

that song in here. He's a bit shy. Best men usually are that way."

"Including yourself?" Belle parried, thinking that she had seen the look her brother spoke of long before. In Owl Canyon, even when she had snubbed Slim, for Joe's sake."

"Me? I'm cut out fo' a bachelor. I'm not shy. I'm too easy. Too liable to be taken in by some designin' female who wouldn't know a saddle tree from a waffle iron. Think we better leave it to Slim tonight."

"Of course. And you're tired."

"I am, Sis. Been under a strain. There's been times I sure craved a drink, but that's out. And I wouldn't wonder but what we were out—of the woods."

The Raynor matter was taboo between them by mutual consent. She smiled at him.

"I'm sure of it, Joe. Shall we go to bed?"

It was then they saw the headlights of the car outside, halting, shut off; heard steps on the porch. They looked at each other in a quick alarm. The dead Mexican, for all their affected cheer, stalked a constant phantom through the secret places of their minds.

Joe went to the door and admitted the visitors. Two were big cattlemen, the third the sheriff of the county.

"We're a bit late, Walsh, but it's important and we had to go to other places." The speaker was a tall, gaunt man with strong features, iron gray hair, mustache and goatee of the old-timer. It was Hesketh, a close friend of the elder Walsh while the latter was alive.

Walsh produced cigars, saw them seated. Belle, reassured by the talk of other visitors, slipped out to make coffee.

"Won't keep you long," said Hesketh. "It's about this Night Hawks matter. They've got to be cleaned up. I'm representing the Cattlemen's Association in this. We came to an agreement at the last meeting. A special one. You weren't there. We didn't want to say what it was about in the notice. Can't be too careful of a leak. I trust my hands, but I'm hanged if I know or not whether some of them haven't been mixed up in it. Can't keep track of 'em when they say they're goin' to town. I suppose you didn't think it important, like the rest we've seen tonight.

"We want you in with us. We've voted ten thousand dollars to be given to the men who turn in the ringleaders. Understand there are three of 'em. One called

the 'Chief.' We've got the funds and, if we hadn't, we'd raise 'em by special assessment.



"You've got that shipment rounded up you were talking about to me?"

He did not mention Diaz, but he was in Walsh's confidence. He had helped in the preliminaries. Walsh nodded.

"Holding them in Little Park," he said. "Deliver 'em tomorrow."

"Tidy amount there for you. Got a night herd? One you can trust?"

"Yes."

"We've heard a few things. You're in with us on this, of course? In your own interests."

Walsh hesitated as his sister came in with the coffee.

"My brother will join," she said. "We were talking it over the other night."

"Good. Thanks for the coffee, Miss Belle. We need it. It's going to be a bad night, and we may be busy. We're looking for some action tonight, Walsh. I'd ask you to come along; there's thirty of us ready for a start when we get back, but I recommend you to go over to Little Park, whether you're sure of your men or not. Never can tell when those Night Hawks'll swoop. They've probably realized their time is getting short. Bound to have heard what we're up to.

He leaned forward and shot out his question. "What do you know about your man, Raynor? Is he in charge of your herd at Little Park?"

Little bunches of muscle showed along the line of Walsh's jaws as he set them for what might be coming. He did not look at his sister.

"Why?" he asked. "Though Raynor ain't there. He's taking a bunch over to the reservation on the beef contract."

"Humph! Ever thought he might be mixed up in the steers run off from you? You told me it almost looked like inside work one time."

Walsh spoke slowly, picking his phrase. "I've got no evidence that way," he said.

"When did he start with the reservation bunch?" Walsh told him.

"Figure he ought to be there by this?"

"Ought to be there yesterday at the latest. Delivery's due tomorrow. They won't inspect till then. I didn't get the whole contract. They'll wait till it's filled from other ranches. I allowed two days for red tape. They use it plenty over to the Agency."

The three looked at one another and nodded. The sheriff coughed and spoke for the first time, jerking his head toward the third man.

"Pritchard, here, says he saw Raynor in town last night, or thinks he did."

"I ain't certain," said Pritchard. "I ran out of gas outside of Padilla's *fonda* an' went in to get some. Padilla's got a car. There was a bunch of men in the bar, talking Mex. Some of 'em went out as I went in. One of 'em sure looked like Raynor."

"That's all," said Hesketh, rising, bowing to Belle as he finished his coffee. "We'll be going along. Made time in the sheriff's car, but I wouldn't wonder if we all forked saddle saddles tonight. It's going to be a wild one."

Gun belts showed on all of them as they stood up.

"Take my advice and go out to Little Park, Walsh," said Hesketh as they left. An' take a good slicker along. You'll need it."

Walsh watched the car lunging off through the night, heard the first patter of heavy rain.

"You're going, Joe?"

"I think I'd better. Hesketh's advice is usually good. There's something on foot. If that Night Hawk bunch wants to make a quick haul before they get stopped, ours is a tempting proposition. Only five men with Slim. I hate to leave you alone."

"That's foolish. There's Wing. And nothing to be afraid of. I'll go to bed."

THE steers that had been destined for the wards of the Nation were herded in a narrow glen recessed on the mesa top, two days' journey from Tres Piños. Two men guarded them, though

only one was on watch and he sleepily, cursing his luck at being left out of the fun.

As the rain began to come down hard he went over and woke his companion, setting his watch, the only one between them, ahead an hour. He had no intention of getting wet.

"It is not that late," said the other in Spanish. "You are a liar, Pedro, and if the moon was up I'd prove it to you."

"It's up, but you can't see it for the clouds, *compadre*."

"Then what in the name of God is the good of standing watch and getting drowned when you can't see the hand before the eyes. Let the steers watch themselves! They can't get out of the gulch. It's wired."

"You wouldn't say that if Raynor was here."

"Raynor! He works for us tonight. Let us rest. It is an evil night. I heard an owl after I lay down. The worst of luck. If things go wrong it will not be with us. Here are fat cattle. We know the hidden way through the mesa. We might even take them to the reservation and get the money. We could say the storm hindered us."

"Luis, you have the brain of the archangel Michael. I will share what is left in the flask with you. Good *mescal*. And then we will rest."

With the tarpaulins left by their absent comrades spread over them the pair, riders in the pay of Tres Piños, members of the Night Hawks on picket duty, snored in unison.

OUT from Caroca, clad in ponchos of oiled cloth, hiding them from chin to knee, save as they flapped in the gallop, like wings, a masked cavalcade swept through the dark, stormy night, racing toward Little Park where Slim and Walters, slickered, but with their gun belts outside, rode round the restless herd in their turn at night watch.

It was Slim who first caught sight of Walsh in a gleam of lightning that showed



up the hides of the restless herd like wet satin, their tossing horns and restless eyes.

"Thought I'd ride over," said Walsh.

"Everything O. K.?"

"All's well, so far. We're holdin' 'em. It's sure goin' to be a wet night. Everything all right to the ranch?"

"Yes."

"Miss Belle there alone?"

"With Wing. She wanted me to come."

Slim said nothing. A vagrant wish came into his mind that she had not been left at Tres Piños without her brother. But there could be no danger at the ranch. Somehow he felt there was trouble in the night.

"We just went on watch," he said finally.

"Good. I'll ride with you."

"There's coffee by the fire, under a tarp," said Walters.

"Fine. But I——"

He never finished the speech. Out of the black night a horde of horsemen swarmed, a shouting mob that split about the herd. Guns fired, stabbing the gloom. Lightning flared and the rain poured down as men struggled out of blankets and sought their saddles.

Riderless horses careered, charging the stampeding cattle. Clang of breaking wire. Shot after shot. Seven men against five times as many. Fighting against desperate odds as the thunder rolled and crashed.

The herd once broken, started toward the fence where the wire had been already cut to give passage to the raiders. Though many of them blundered against the wire in their frenzy from fire and storm, the rest poured through the gap toward which they were driven; while the majority of the Night Hawks seemed bent on exterminating the men in charge of the steers.

Whether they recognized Walsh, identified him as the owner, was hard to say. Tremendous bursts of electric discharge levined through the clouds or lit up their under surfaces and all the rain-soaked earth, with the steel rods of the water glittering in the instant before darkness once more shut down.

So brilliant was this display that it momentarily illumined all unmasked faces, bringing them out of the blackness as vividly as a photographer's flashlight.

Yet all this was so mingled with the speed and twisting of the horses, upflung necks, rearing bodies, men bending from their saddles to fire, or riding close to their mounts' manes while they reloaded, that

distinguishing individuals was largely a question of chance.

Slim and Walters were the closest together when the rustlers came charging and shouting through the fence in their well planned offensive, surrounding the herd, driving them off, while they wiped out all witnesses of their crime. That Raynor was in this Slim did not doubt, and he guessed that the reservation delivery had never been made. The foreman and his followers had got wind of the sale to the Mexican federals and, knowing every inch of the terrain, had watched the gathering of the herd and waited until the last moment when they could strike most efficiently. Then the weather turned in favor of their devilry with its own fearful artillery and barrage of wind and rain.

As he saw—while lightning glared a ghastly blue—the T. P. Steers leaping through the gap where the wire had been nipped, plunging through breaking strands that gave before their brutish madness or piling up against it in a living wave, Slim, firing at the ponchoed figures whose disguise made it easy to distinguish friend from foe, sought for the foreman.

Here was a man's affair. Raynor arrayed against Tres Piños would be fair game to Slim's gun. The hold Slim fancied Raynor held over Walsh could be wiped out and a good riddance. But all the raiders were masked with black silk kerchiefs tied above the bridges of their noses, hanging down to join the batlike ponchos. From beneath the short folds, hands were thrust to hold reins and shoot, as the robber cavalry systematically went about their butchery.

Not without their rebuffs. On his right Slim saw Walters coolly discharging his gun with deliberate aim, waiting for the lightning flashes that came in fast succession. The Englishman would probably never acquire the cowboy seat, but he rode like a polo player, weaving through the men who opposed him and sought to shoot him down in the wild turmoil of gale-flung masses of rain, peal after peal of deafening thunder, bellowing of cattle, bawling of men, crack of pistols, plunging, galloping horses.

Slim felt the swift sear of a bullet at his right side, judged it had grazed his ribs, felt a warm gush of blood against the chill of his slicker envelope. His hat was gone, by bullet or wind, and the rain pelted at him, obscuring his sight, plastering his hair down on his forehead. What of the rest of his guard, of Walsh, he could not

tell. Even Walters was lost in the mad mêlée now, but he saw ponies galloping by in the glares, their saddles empty, reins trailing, heavy stirrups clattering, and could not tell in the brief glimpses to which side they belonged. He hardly was conscious of these things, they were thrust upon his vision while he was actively occupied in looking out for his especial opponents in the wild phantasmagoria where everything seemed madly out of focus, distorted, leaping out of the dark in a mad chaos.

His roan bucked, and he guessed it stung by a bullet though it did not falter. A missile thudded into the wood of his left stirrup and splintered it, though it did not touch his foot. Now and then he caught the yells of the raiders. At first they had been meant to start the cattle; now they were calling to each other to kill.

One loud voice bellowed close to him.

Spurts of flaming powder gas shuttled through the night, hell fingers pointing the way death had gone. There came the shrill neigh of a pony, mortally hit. A buffet came to Slim, not seemingly severe, as if someone had flipped the side of his head at his left ear. Almost instantly there came a numbness that passed away again, but blood was pouring down his cheek, to be washed off by the pelting rain. A lock of his hair, lank with the wet, had gone. The top of his ear was torn away. If he got out alive from these odds, these men intent on murder, balked in their desire only by the fury of the elements and the night, he would carry a souvenir of it to his grave. It was a close call. Death had literally whispered to him and passed on.

Raynor he could not find. How could he expect to? Despair blent with rage as he saw riders closing in on him, heard the near hum of the bullets they sent, while he, in the tense defenceless moment of reloading, broke his gun. Riding like an Indian, elbow crooked about the horn, crouching on one side of his leaping roan, he thrust cartridges into the cylinder with fingers that were stiff from the rain, clumsy, so that he dropped two of the shells he had taken from his belt and straightened up again with only four loads between him and the men who rode to surround him.

The last flash had shown the cattle all through the wire, displayed little groups where one or two men fired at half a score, perhaps broke through the ring with empty gun, perhaps went down—and not alone—

to the soaking earth. Guns still cracked outside his own particular affray, his com-



rades were not yet all killed, though none of them could long survive.

"Clean 'em up!"

That came from the Night Hawks' leader with a flash from the side of his pony's neck. Came with a blow as the bullet bored its way through Slim's left forearm, numbing it so that he could barely hold the reins. He dropped them over his saddle horn and rode with his knees, swinging the snorting roan straight for the dark bulk whence shot and voice had come.

This was not Raynor, but it was the voice of the man who had been called the Chief in the corral shed. Slim was certain of it, sure of its inflection. It had been unmistakably in command.

The other reared his horse with spurs and curb to shield the shot he expected, but Slim, wild with the pain of his disabling wound, desperate in the knowledge that soon he must go plunging out of his saddle to oblivion, yet cool enough in his intent and its performance, roweled his own mount. The roan, knowing this called for supreme effort, charged the opposing steed with weight and battle squeal, with drumming hoofs and chiseling teeth.

The horse went down, and a shot came up from the ground as the leader crashed and fired upward as he struck dirt. Slim fired back to a target behind the flash, and the struggling horse pawed its way up and went charging off, dragging by one stirrup a man who would never pull trigger again.

One shot more—hit or miss he could not tell—a swerve in a wild hide-and-seek—only two cartridges in his gun—one arm useless—the roan tiring a little, perhaps from loss of blood—it was very close to the end. Slim wheeled a little in his saddle, he seemed to see the next flash of lightning through a veil. Down by the fence the cattle seemed coming back, leaping—

By the eternal God, these were not cattle but men, riding like the whirlwind.

shouting cries of grim triumph as they came! No ponchos or masks on these.

"We've got 'em, boys. Yah-yah-yah!" The hoarse gutturals of excited men who sight their human quarry after long suffering and resentment, men who rode without thought of quarter or pity, hardened with the cruelty of justice.

The lightning was gone, but ray after ray shot white arrows into the night, winked out and on again. The cattlemen had electric torches that they switched on and off as they rode, their guns barking, biting, while they picked out their targets.

The eyes of the horses shone like great jewels as the rays picked them out, and then shot dazzling into the faces of the riders. Taken by surprise, then consternation as they knew themselves outmatched and their leader no longer able to rally or direct them, the Night Hawks sought safety in helter-skelter flight. It was every man for himself, pursued by the avenging posse of the Cattlemen's Association, the raid broken, a failure, the boasted power of the Night Hawks snapped.

A lone rider, low in the saddle, raced past Slim, a dull blot in motion, until the lightning revealed him, every hair on the horse slick with rain, the man's black poncho like the hide of a broaching porpoise, his black mask roughly moulding his features, hat brim low.

On the horse's flank showed the hip brand of the Tres Piños ranch—T. P.

It was hard to be sure of color in that momentary glimpse of palpitating, fluctuating light, but if the horse were a buckskin, it was Raynor's, the one chosen by him for his first string pony in preference to his own. Incidentally it was the fastest horse on the ranch.

And Slim had seen something else that gave him fresh strength and energy to top the tide of relief that had come with the charging legion of the cattlemen—a wire scar, half healed, a triangular wound that was unmistakable. It was Raynor making toward the ranch.

He remembered that Belle was there alone—save for Wing. The scene in Owl Canyon projected itself on the screen of memory, Belle struggling in Raynor's grasp. Slim to the rescue—then, and now.

He felt the roan's quarter give a little as he wheeled him about on his hind legs,

but the game and sturdy mustang leaped to the chase in full stride that seemed again unflinching. Raynor was well away, lost in the darkness, but the roan followed a trail that his senses found, though Slim could not. Behind them the shots and the shouting died away as they swept round the shoulder of a hill. The rain was ceasing, or passing over. A strong wind blew. Half way to the zenith there was the merest hint of a moon striving to shoulder through the flying wrack. The air was suddenly cold and sweet, and Slim responded to it, alert, forgetful of his wounds, his loss of blood; a champion going to the rescue of the girl he loved. He felt no real fear of the outcome, only an elation, a confidence that he would overtake Raynor in time and shoot it out—Raynor's finish.

He did not believe that Raynor thought he was being followed any more than he imagined he had been recognized. One faint flutter of lightning showed the foreman, well ahead, well forward in the saddle, using the most of the buckskin's speed. He was gaining on the roan.

"Let out a link, Petey." Slim bent and patted the neck that stretched out rigid as a bar while the sound hoofs drummed the sodden turf and the belly broomed spray from the clumps of sage through which they plunged.

Up went the roan's head, with an impatient movement that seemed to say, "I am trying." But it was plain that he was doing his best and that it was not equal to the pace of the buckskin. It was too far to risk one of Slim's two precious shots. He knew that the bullet had either bruised or broken one of the bones of his left forearm. It was no more good to him than a stick. To reload without halting was impossible. Hard to accomplish with one hand under the best conditions. And the buckskin was drawing away.

Slim's buoyancy vanished like the gas from a punctured balloon. Unseen in the night, his face became gaunt and wan and old, strained, lined deep, while his imagination ran riot as to what the fate of Belle Walsh might be at Raynor's reckless, relentless hands that night. As best he knew how, he prayed.

The roan began to falter, to shorten stride, to go lame in its off hindquarter. When Slim patted its neck he had felt the wound, high on the crest, that first had stung it. But it was plainly hit in the flank or the quarter. Like himself it had



been losing blood, and it was bearing his burden, straining every energy, working the great pump of its heart to the utmost.

"Petey, you got to make it—somehow. You got to, hawss. God, make him last! I can't do it afoot. That devil of a Sled'll get her. God, help us git through—an' damn him!"

RAYNOR felt that he had got clear away from the disaster that had engulfed his companions, overtaken the organization of the rustlers, wrecked his own plans that he had devised so cunningly and given out to the members of the Night Hawks.

The men he had taken with him, when he left the two on watch over the reservation shipment, were by now either dead, badly wounded, captured. Dead, their presence would damn him, alive he knew they would squeal. His game was up in Caroca County, but he could still sting, like a crushed hornet.

He might be able to get away with the reservation stock—though not by delivering them to the Agency, for he knew the Agent there would have all the news before he could get there. He would have been warned, and offers of rewards would soon be made for him. He would have to re-join the two and drive the cattle through secret mesa ways to where he could sell them. That was risky, but possible. But his grand coup had failed, and he was an outlaw.

Walsh! He hoped that Walsh had been killed, and then hoped that he had not. He might still milk Walsh from a distance under threat of the penitentiary and the gallows. As for the girl—he had meant to marry her, to get possession of the T. P. ranch ultimately. The Night Hawks organization was only a temporary affair to him, a money supplier, a source of excitement. Belle Walsh he did not crave from any personal, physical choice. He would like to master her, but he knew he would soon tire of her. Girls like La Rose, like La Paloma, were more in his line.

There was a grudge against La Rose that would have to be let go now. Later he might run across her and he would not forget.

But Belle Walsh. Here was his immediate revenge on Walsh, who otherwise might slip from his clutches if he had come out of the fight. Raynor had some money at Tres Piños, in the mattress of his bunk. He'd get that; there was a bottle there, as

well, a flask of *mescal*, strong stuff that would put courage into a cripple. Quite a little money, winnings at monte from the pigeons he plucked in the bunkhouse games, his share of raids, his private stealings from Walsh.

Damn Walsh! He'd get even. Damn the girl who flouted him and told him to stay away from the house! She was stuck on Slim Marvin. He was pretty sure he had put a bullet through Slim Marvin's head, but if he had been mistaken and Slim still lived, why he would be welcome to Belle Walsh—after Sled was through with her.

She would be in her room, asleep. Wing didn't count. Save that the fool Chink left the back door to the kitchen open of a night. No need to lock doors at Tres Piños, they considered, though he believed that Walsh locked the front door from force of habit every night. But the back would be open and he knew the lay of the house downstairs, he knew where the girl slept. If her door was locked—it would not matter. He would take her by fright and force, let her scream and scratch as she would—this time.

He had no idea that he was followed. He might not have much time for what he planned, but he would have enough. The fight was still going on. The cattle would have to be rounded up again, there would be long flight and pursuit. Walsh would wait to know his cattle were safe before he came back—if he was able to.

Better let the reservation stock alone, he decided. The surprise attack of the cattlemen showed too plainly that he had been suspected, spied upon, even as he had spied on Slim working at the round-up, riding with Belle. He might run into a trap. He had better strike across the border.

He reached the ranch headquarters, pulled up in front of the bunkhouse and got down from the half-blown buckskin. He did not turn on the light, but crept to his own bunk and found his cache, paper money in a compact package, the flask of *mescal*, from which he took long gulps, gasping, as the fiery stuff stung tongue and palate and throat while its fumes mounted to his brain.

Outside again, he listened, fancying he heard hoofbeats, deciding it was only the drip and splash of rain from roofs and gutters.

The back door was open, as he expected. He crossed the kitchen, feeling his way, striking some object against a pan

of rising biscuit, stumbling over a chair. A door opened, a voice that squeaked a little called out.

"Who that? That you, Misteh Walsh?"



Raynor tore off his mask. "It's me, Wing. Raynor. Got a message for Miss Walsh from her brother. Just rode in from Little Park. It's important."

The Chinaman was plainly suspicious. He sniffed as if he smelled the fiery *mescal* on Raynor's breath.

"Missy Belle, she in bed, asleep," he said. "Whasse mally you no give message in mo'ning?"

"She won't stay in bed when she hears it," said Raynor. "You give it to her, Wing. Come here and I'll tell it to you. Don't want to shout it all over the house."

A little less doubtful, Wing switched on the light in his room, then in his spotless kitchen, entering in padded slippers to where Raynor sat on the table, swinging one leg, trying to appear nonchalant though he was chafing with the delay.

"Gimme a drink of water, Wing," he said casually.

He caught the extended left arm at the wrist and pulled Wing to him. His gun barrel fell on Wing's head and the Chinaman crumpled up and fell like a wet rag, unconscious and bleeding. Raynor picked him up easily in his arms, flung him on his own bed, bound him and gagged him with strips of cloth he found in the kitchen. He turned out the light in Wing's room, locked the door, taking the key from the inside and keeping it. He picked up the heavy glass that had not broken when Wing dropped it, and poured into it half of what was left in the flask, swallowing it. Then he hesitated, and finally emptied the pint container.

Last of all he turned out the kitchen switch and stole through the pantry into the big living-room, which was also dining-room. The stairs were to his right. Through the big porch windows came a subdued light. There were gleams of pallid moonlight on the porch.

Raynor listened at the foot of the stairs, hearing nothing but the ticking of a clock, water dripping in the kitchen.

With the face of a grinning fiend he commenced to climb, a dim bulk that lost

itself as he progressed, little creaks of the treads proclaiming his slow and cautious progress. At the head of the stairway he paused again, turned to the landing's right and tried the handle of a door. It moved, but it would not open.

Bolt or lock held him. With an oath he stepped back. There was a little stir inside the room, the girl's voice calling.

"Who's there?"

Raynor made no answer. He took a backward step or two and flung himself at the panels, shoulder first. They gave a hollow sound, but they resisted. Cursing, he launched a kick with all his drunken might. Something gave, or started to give, and, with two more kicks, the lock catch tore out its screws through the splintering wood. As he came through the doorway with his leering face the room was suddenly bright with light. Belle Walsh had touched a button by the bed where she sat up from the pillows, her eyes shining bravely, a gun leveled in her hand at the intruder.

"Put up your hands, Raynor, or I'll shoot," she said, and, as he lurched forward, pulled trigger.

The shot went wild. Raynor had moved too swiftly, snatching a cushion from a chair and jerking it in the same motion fairly for the bed. While she flung it aside he reached her, wrested away her weapon.

"Yah, you an' yore popgun!" he jeered. The girl drew the quilt about her, her eyes widening as she began to realize she was at bay against this beast.

There was a slight scuffling sound on the stairs. It ceased. Raynor turned slowly, wondering whether Wing could have managed to get free, a little stupid, his brain sluggish from the quantity of strong alcohol he had taken so rapidly into his system. Behind him, the girl cowered, hope lightening her face that swiftly dulled again as she saw Slim, his hair lank about his forehead, one side of his head bloody, blood dripping to the floor from the useless arm, reel against the doorframe. His eyes were set, his face racked with pain and exhaustion, as he strove to summon the reserve he had already drained heavily.

Raynor laughed.

"Here's where the best man wins, Slim. An' where you lose, damn yore soul!"

He fired, deliberately, just as a blaze was beginning to come into Slim's tired eyes. Belle screamed and Raynor fired

again at the figure slumping to the floor.



The wounded arm was put out as uncertain prop to the failing knees, Slim's face growing gray as the blood drained

away behind the tan. Lips, opening a little, shut again as the jaws clamped and from the floor, streaking upward, there came a spurt of fire—another. The emptied revolver clattered, sliding along the floor, stopped by a rug where Raynor clutched the fringe convulsively as he strove to rise—and could not.

Slim propped himself by the door frame. His voice sound hollow as the voice of a ghost.

"Got—here—in—time. Reckon—I—jus' made it—honey."

SLIM blinked at the room. Daylight now, and he was no longer by the door where he had slumped when Raynor's shot got him in the shoulder. The second had missed as he had fallen. Or maybe he had got Raynor first. Any way he had got him.

Same room, but he was in bed. In——? Someone came over from the window and stood beside him.

"Good man, what? Got your eyes open, have you? Got to keep quiet. Doctor's orders."

Slim opened a mouth that seemed somehow rusty at the hinges, moved a strangely feeble tongue and spoke in a foolishly weak voice.

"Raynor?"

"You're not to ask too many questions, old chap, but I'll tell you what you've got to know."

"You better, or I'll run a high fever."

"I'm not your only nurse, old chap. I'm just relief. Mealtimes you've got a better one than I am and she's a regular tyrant. What? Be on duty in a few minutes."

"Raynor? You nearly put his light out, but he wasn't quite dead when the crowd got here. One chap they said was the leader was shot through the brain."

"I shot him. They called him Chief. He was a chap named Kirk. Won my money down at the Cactus. I recognized his voice. Couldn't see his face."

"It was Kirk all right. And that ties

you up with another chunk of the reward. Seems I bagged the third man they were after as the jolly old ringleaders. He was dead, too. The chaps were a bit excited. Three of our chaps got hurt besides four or five of theirs. So they took Raynor while there was some life left in him, and hung him up to the middle one of the three pines.

"None of ours killed. Harper's the worst off, and they say he'll pull through. You remember Miss Baker? Used to dance a bit at the Cactus? She is out here helping to nurse the boys over in the bunkhouse. By the way, she and I are going to get married next month. Congratulations in order and all that sort of rot. Thanks, old chap. Don't tire yourself by talking. You can talk to your other nurse in about three minutes, all she'll jolly well let you.

"You see the reward was worded ten thousand dollars for the apprehension of the three main johnnies or for such information as shall cause them to be apprehended. Something like that. That makes three thousand three hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three and one-third cents for me and six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six——"

Slim interrupted him. "Nothing of the kind. Halves or nothing. Our agreement was to split."

The Englishman nodded.

"Correct. Mighty sporting of you, just the same. We got all the cattle. Turned 'em over next day. Some of them were a bit cut up, but they were all for commissary, and the troops didn't seem to care. Walsh got the money. Everything is happy and the old goose honks aloft, you know. Wing got a crack on the jolly old bean. That's healed up days ago, though he insists on wearing a bandage round the cocoanut. Badge of honor—what?"

"Hold on. Days ago? What's the idea?"

"Nothing but the natural flight of time. It will wing, old chap. You've been in bed for ten days. Doped up a bit most of the time to give the patches a chance to graft in." He looked at his wrist watch. "Sorry, but my time's up. She's always punctual. If she catches me talking there'll be wigs on the green. That's her prerogative, from now on. You're a lucky dog, Slim, but you deserve it."

There were light footsteps outside and Walters placed a finger to his lips.

"Mum's the word, old chap. I haven't told you a thing. Let her do it all over

again." He nodded again and winked, slipping out of the door as a girl in crisp, white linen came in. She was not a nurse, because she wore no cap and because she broke all regulations by giving a glad cry as she saw Slim's eyes open.

"Slim!"

The kiss, which was mutual, was quite spontaneous. So were those that followed.

"I can't put my arms round you, honey," Slim finally said. "Seems neither of 'em work real well." A statement that was corroborated by two fast healing perforations, one in the left forearm and another through the right shoulder, enough to have spoiled any man's shooting, but a lover's.

Belle Walsh responded as he wanted her to, though she protested it was against the doctor's orders for him to be excited.

"Excited, honey? If you jest knew how rested I was. Specially about money."

"Money?" She thought he was getting delirious, but his eyes laughed at her.

"I've got nigh five thousand dollars comin' to me, honey. Enough to buy into a ranch, mebber, or start one of our own."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, dear," she told him. "Not to me."

Slim sighed happily.

"It sure would have to me. Now I'm goin' to hurry up an' get well. Walters tells me he's goin' to get married nex' month. I don't see why I should be left out in the cold like that, jest because I happen to be sick fo' a spell."

"You are not to talk about anything exciting. If you do, I'll leave you."

"That'll excite me mo'."

"I've got something that will put you to sleep, sir."

"You wouldn't try to make me take it."

"Would you refuse me anything?"

Such talk is silly to those not taking

place in it, but it was eminently satisfying to both these two.

THE shadow had passed from Tres Piños. La Rose—Miss Baker now, until she became Mrs. Walters—had got some hints from La Paloma that Raynor had deceived Walsh into thinking he was a murderer, but she declared that she hated all gringos and would not testify to anything definite. It was Wing who came to the rescue when Belle questioned him.

"Allee light. I talk now. Night Hawk all gone. Layno', him dead. Chinaboy not afraid now. I speakee. Layno' all same makee fool of boss. One time boss get too much dlunk, go along with Layno' one place. Catchee mo' dlink. This time no good. All same dlug. Sabe?"

"Then boss get in low. Layno' he take boss out—too much dlink, too much dlug. No sabe what happen. Layno' tell him he kill man."

"Man not kill. All same bad man sheliff he likee catch. Boss pay money. Layno' he give some this man. He go Mexico. Boss he think all time he kill him."

"How do you know this, Wing? Can you prove it?"

"Suah. Can do. Catchee witness. L'il Mexican gal. This gal, her auntie, she belong along this place all happen. Gal she that place along that time, too. Bimeby my cousin he mally that gal. Velly foolish but he in love. Then evellybody damn fool. Waltehs, he damfool—" He checked himself.

"Slim, I don't think him damfool, Missy Belle, suppose he fall in love along of you. He allee same fine man, lide like hell, fight like hell. I think he makee love same way."

Which recommendation may or may not have had something to do with the finale of this story. Which ends—even as it does in the movies—in a clinch.





THE FADEOUT

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Author of "Mountain Law," "The Horse of Hurricane Reef," etc.

IN A CENTRAL AMERICAN PORT, THE HAUNT OF MANY EXILES—VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY—THE SPOTLIGHT KID WAS IN A POSITION TO SEE MANY A DRAMA PLAYED OUT BEFORE HIS EYES. THIS TIME HE TOOK A PART—AND PLAYED THE RED TO WIN

SO THAT is America? Very good—but what is it to me?"

Señor Brown wiped his monocle across the dirty sleeve of his tropic whites and glanced superciliously about the dirt-floored shed which was the motion picture house of Puerto Amero.

Spotty Larue, otherwise the Spotlight Kid, up in the projection booth, sighed patiently as he slipped the old news reel from home back in the film can. He hated this broken adventurer, Brown. Brent, the operative of the United States department of justice, nodded silently across the projector magazine. Hidden in the booth above the main exit, the two could look down through the narrow ports at the figure of Brown, a suspected fugitive standing in the center aisle of the empty theater.

On the bench sat *El Comandante*, Don Rafael, who had watched the secret showing of this last season news film, and its effect upon Señor Brown. His jackal, the Spotlight Kid, and Brent, the detective, realized that Brown had acted well his part.

Spotty switched off the projection arcs. The grimy little house was lit by the moonlight through the canvas walls, and the palm fronds touched them in the evil-smelling breeze from across a sluggish jungle river.

Spotty shrugged. Not for nothing was

he himself, an exile and an underling to *El Comandante* in this obscure port of broken men. But Brent hadn't come for him—his old job was forgotten. Not much, anyway. But Brown—whoever he was—the white crowd, marooned here to work for the fruit line company, would be glad to get rid of Señor Alberto Brown. A hopeless pest, this Brown.

So Spotty, the other derelict, merely grinned at the man trap, which was being set below him.

Brown, the beachcomber, unshaven, dirty, slightly drunk as ever, arose from the bench and touched a soiled handkerchief delicately to his lips. Then looked about at the toad-like figure of the district *Comandante* who grinned back at him complacently. This nonchalant pose was quite too evident. The Federal detective, hidden in the booth, listened for the next satiric comment of this Señor Alberto Brown, debarred from the Colony Club, a hanger-on of the native *cantinas* and a pest about the wharves of the fruit line company.

Brown was affecting his old insolence with that absurd piece of glass at his eye.

"I fail to see why I am invited here, Don Rafael, for this private showing of a bally American news film. Very int'restin', no doubt, but—" Then the derelict stopped, reeled slightly, and sat down.

He had not noticed that Mrs. Esterly

was back of him in the dusk. Spotty Larue, the operator, up in the silent booth, had gaped in amazement when she came from under the gallery. This pink-and-white woman from Home, in a film of a gown and white shoes, just as she had come from the ball of the *Hotel de los Extranjeros*—what could she be to this drunken drifter of the Latin American ports?

Don Rafael laughed shortly. The department of justice man, up in the booth by Spotty's projection machine, glanced at the operator meaningly. Down below, *El Comandante* had arisen with an oily courtesy to Mrs. Esterly. And Señor Brown had slumped in the seat.

"Run the film again, operator!" observed *El Comandante*.

"It is unnecessary," said Mrs. Esterly bluntly. "I was standing there. I saw. He is not the man in the picture!"

"She says it well," grunted the Federal detective.

Brown was coming back by the center aisle with a grave drunken dignity, passing the dainty woman with the merest glance of disinterest. The portly *Commandante* called after him.

"Ah, then—Señor Brown! Tomorrow evening we shall run the picture. The American officers from the destroyers will



be on shore for the dance at the Hotel. We have such little entertainment at Puerto Amero for distinguished guests. They will be glad to see this news reel, Señor Brown—from America. That place—the Marines in column, señor—the officer group saluting. Ah, for a homesick man, it will be much, señor!"

The renegade was staring at him now, whitefaced, and with fever-brilliant eyes. He stumbled as he turned; and suddenly Mrs. Esterly stepped to him, a hand to his arm and turned defiantly upon the grinning native official.

"It is not so! Just a likeness, Don Rafael. What do you mean by this?" She clung to the tall adventurer in the soiled whites. "Allen, it is not you—no!"

"Ah—Allen!" *El Comandante* gestured up to his watching operator in the booth. "The name, I believe, of the missing American paymaster. It is sad!"

He lit a cigarette. The man and the

woman were passing under the booth to the exit. The Spotlight Kid above heard a throbbing whisper when they were out on the stones of the moonlit *Embarcadero* with the closed, silent shops on one side, and the fruit line wharves along the other by the waterside.

A broken fugitive from Home, nothing unusual. The Kid was hardened to these moochers who tapped you for a drink, a bed, a peso. But this pink-and-white woman from the Hotel with him?

Brent of the department of justice was swinging down the gallery stairs to join Don Rafael. Spotty Larue had closed the door and was behind them.

"Well, we might as well arrange for the extradition papers," grunted the detective wearily. "He is Major Allen Hurd of the Marines. Paymaster. Short fifteen thousand in his accounts, and vanished at Havana last April. The races got him. If nothing else was needed this woman gave him away. Who is she?"

Don Rafael shrugged. As to that he did not care. At least he was willing for the United States operative to think so. It was enough that he got this insolent vagabond out of his path after what happened last month when Señor Alberto Brown had slapped the Don's mouth because of his remark concerning Mrs. Esterly.

"She's at the bottom of it, I reckon," divined the sleuth professionally; "women and fast horses and the American bars in Havana. Looks that way, she trying to cover for him."

"Forget that, will you?" murmured Kid Larue. "There's one who's on the level. I seen 'em all, and this pink one is right. Leave her out, will you?"

"Friend of yours?" queried the detective interestedly.

The Spotlight Kid laughed. A friend of his—any woman of the Hotel crowd? Why, in three years no nice girl from Home had so much as spoken to him! He just saw them afar off, on the Club verandas, or along the *Embarcadero*, or hot nights at his little theater when he ran the pictures which the fortnightly steamers brought. A friend of his—the outcast living on the beach?

Even the *Comandante* laughed now at the idea of a white girl from the States being a friend of his jackal. Concerning Spotty Larue of Don Rafael's picture house, the few white women of Puerto Amero—wives of fruit company officials, or sojourners at the Hotel—had long since

said all there was to say. Clerks and husbands had supplied the rest.

No good. Hung out with the native crowd. What can one expect of a drifter in the Carib ports? An exile from home, they said, after slipping a knife into some welching bookmaker in New Orleans. Somebody added that Don Rafael had aided his getaway, and in return Spotty Larue had helped the Don on a number of queer, profitable deals. In the lotteries, and running a Chink or two, perhaps, back up into Home-land's hundred millions. Perhaps in the Don's dope deals, too.

Quién sabe? Rather a pity. A nice-looking boy to have been a racetrack tout and petty gamester, and then underling for this trafficking port tyrant, Don Rafael. One had to give him up as the sort of an American of whom one is not proud in an alien land. He had gone brown, and the American crowd was pleased that he had the good taste, at least, to admit it and keep away from them. Which Spotty was pleased to do. Self-exile had become quite profitable this last year—Chink-running and all!

Why, tonight, he was grinning blithely behind this perspiring detective's back at the joke of it! Brent on his man-hunt for the defaulting paymaster of Marines, Major Hurd, who had masqueraded as Albert Brown, one-time captain of Anzacs overseas, and a remittance man in Puerto Amero, temporarily stranded. No one had cared enough about Señor Brown to guess at his mystery as he slipped down from respectability to the beach until he had his drunken row with *El Comandante* in Dula's barroom.

Particularly had Señor Alberto Brown annoyed Spotty Larue when he had joined the renegade white crowd of Puerto Amero. Brown had not concealed his contempt for the *Comandante's* underling. And Spotty had dragged Señor Brown drunk and reviling him, out of the *cantinas*, got him to bed in his shack at a native boatman's place; nursed and cared for and cursed the fellow, and got only satiric condescension in return.

And but one thing stuck in Spotty's craw—just one. He knew Brown was American all right. The monocle, the drooping Anglicized mustache, the drawing speech—"Bunk!" grumbled Spotty. "I'd stand for everything except him bawlin' out my pictures. The news reel film from home. His land—and mine. I'll bust him one, some night, when he gets fresh. What's eatin' him?"

And so, tonight, when Don Rafael had lured the gentleman-pest of the *cantinas*



into the empty theater, and a United States secret service man had arrived from New Orleans by the same steamer which brought the fortnightly films, Spotty

felt relieved. Brown was going to get just what was coming to him. And by the news reels from Home which he had despised! Don Rafael had happened to see that old news reel in Havana which first betrayed the vanished Major Allen Hurd, and the Don had communicated with the American authorities. Big joke on Señor Brown who had derided the picture news from Home! When the Spotlight Kid caught the drift of the game he grinned wickedly. More than that, joyously and defiantly. Why should he care for this drunken, ill-humored outcast, Yank or Briton, Greaser or Canuck, whom the long arm of justice was reaching for? Or for his boss of the moment, Don Rafael Calles, the law and the censor of Puerto Amero?

Inside the Kid's silk shirt was fifteen thousand in good notes—the secret share of his pickings in various grafts—and in the stream that good white ship bound for home. If the Don had ever dreamed that his jackal had saved his loot he would have gone to jail on some trumped-up charge, or to the river. Strange things happen to friendless white men in the jungle ports, who live outside the pale of their breed!

The lotteries and the little wheel spinning every night at Dula's—who could guess at the secret strength which withheld the gambling Kid from these chances, so that he could lug his bankroll home and lose it at Latonia?

Home, with its greatness and its follies! How he had hungered every fortnight when the news reel came along with the program picture! The Kid hated art, and despised drama. A century of Society or Westerns couldn't give him a kick.

But when the magic of the news reels leaped out in his dirty little theater with the palm fronds flicking the wall, out would come the Kid's sweaty face past his projector.

"Luv o' Mike! Oh, you pore hog-tied spigs, you don't know—but you white folks

down there, why don't you yell? Our *tierra*, our land—"

The few fever-silent and cynical whites and the stolid peons couldn't hear him for the whirr of his machine, and he'd sink back cursing them. Didn't it mean anything to 'em?

A thousand feet of Home and yesterday here in this alien, sticky heat and smells!

Men who had died. Women who would never smile again. Buildings that had crumbled.

Why, take tonight now, this strange affair of Señor Brown and the dick who'd come to get him.

There had flashed out Broadway and a golden tower above the blessed traffic murk; Minnesota, and the leap of a ski champion above the piney snow; a Texas rodeo, a mob of beauty contest girls at Atlantic City—and then, *por el amor de Dios!* the flash of thoroughbreds past the wire at Lexington!

Oh, to be young and live it all again! Home—with a bank-roll, too! An owner of a string, perhaps. The college clothes



and all. Swinging past the grandstand where the girls were a glory of silks and sunshine; and the betting ring in a roar when the favorite broke the tape!

It was worth loneliness, and heat, and exile. Saving, skimping, grafting on his crooked employer, pinching a bad *peso* here and a good one there. Nothing worth while in living except that dream of going back; and meantime his little pictures. They'd kept him straight to the white breed, those flicking phantoms of the U. S. A. Kept him from going as this cynic renegade, Señor Brown was going, to the last degradation, fever, drink, despair.

He hated Brown. Brown, sneering at his little pictures. Brown, whom he dragged out of the muck, and loaned shirts to. No decent white man in Puerto Amero would help Brown; Brown had cursed them at the Club and reviled them at the Hotel and gone his swift descent. A stretch at Atlanta would do him good, the Kid was thinking now, as he listened to Brent.

"Naturally, I could not recognize him in that picture of the Marines. A lot of difference, señor, between a clean, up-standing American officer at salute when

the flag goes by, and a bum like this Brown. Got a mustache now, too. Sure about it, eh?"

Don Rafael smirked before the operative from Washington.

"Ah, there is no doubt. In Havana, in the theater of my friend, Heintzmann, who distributes to us, señor, I stood by some American officers when this reel was shown. They stared. They whispered. 'Major Hurd,' said one. 'Poor old Allen,' commented another. 'Wrong in the service,' lamented a third. I enquired, Señor Brent. Ah, there, with them at Quantic, was our fine, drunk gentleman-pest! When he first came here you would have seen him so. When he insulted me, señor, over the Señora Esterly."

"She knew him tonight, all right. Called him Allen. But how did you persuade her to come and look at the picture?"

"Who," murmured Don Rafael, "can tell about a woman? She thought she could help—or she feared. Who knows? And the American officers will identify him tomorrow night. You will guard that news reel of the Marines, eh?"

"*Si, si,*" the Spotlight Kid yawned. They didn't know he was to vanish tonight. Fading away out of this rotten hole forever. Fifteen grand—and health and spirit, youth and humor, all saved to stage that grand comeback when the winter racing opened—Home.

"*Si, si,*" it made him grin. His bank-roll in his shirt, his knife at his belt, and that white ship waiting for the ebb-tide at dawn. From where the three stood on the silent *Embarcadero* he could see the lights of the American destroyer squadron, anchored, calling in, homeward bound from Panama.

Tomorrow the Kid would just be faded out of the picture in this fever hole. That crooked bookie whom he knifed in New Orleans—well, three years is a long time. If he got well it didn't hurt him now; and if he had died, it didn't hurt him at all.

This broken officer would fade out, too! Only differently. Well, life is a wheel, and the little ball spins and drops—on the yellow, black or red. The long shot noses past the field, and you cash your ticket.

He left the department of justice man and the *Comandante* when they turned into the Colony Club grounds, and sauntered past the fruit line wharf toward that ragged little shack where he boarded with old Lua. Here lived also the pretty *mestiza* girl, Rosita. They didn't know he was leaving either. They'd miss him, his jokes

and cheeriness. Still, they'd forget, too. A brown one, or a pink one—you fade out of the picture, and they soon forget you.

He'd get his packed bag, and old Joe, the boatman, would slip him out to that fruit line ship. Mooney, the purser, was expecting him. Mooney would owe the Kid a hundred when he slid over the rail. Mooney bet him that two years ago, that he'd never save his money and get away—clean. Mooney'd be surprised at Spotty Larue's being able to come back in this rotten hole when everything White was against you.

Mooney just didn't know about the phantoms of Home flashing by Spotty's eyes, week after week, the long exile through.

The Spotlight Kid swung on the wharf-piling a moment to watch the moonwash on the river. Sort of dreaming. He just forgot for a time that this was the last night of this piking business for him. Going to be a man now, who could flash a roll on the mob. An owner with a string of bangtails at the tracks. His hand waving cheerily to the girls in the stand. The light of his smile up to a pink-and-white one. Somebody like this pretty little widda who'd been hanging around the Hotel.

The Kid came to, suddenly, for he knew she had come before him. Mrs. Esterly in her filmy gown. She spoke with quiet direction as if she'd known him a long time instead of being the only white woman who had said his name in two years.

"Spotty, you're American, aren't you?"

"I was. They gave me the gate—but I'm comin' back."

He grinned and slid off the post. She stepped nearer, and seemed wondering how anyone could be blithe in this fever hole and exile. So pink and white and perfumed—as if she had come out of one of his pictures.

"I tried to get in your picture house, Spotty. It's locked, but I saw you out here. I want to destroy that film—the one that has the Marines, and Señor Brown."

"A—friend of yours?"

"Yes," she answered evenly. "Major Hurd—he is there. His brother officers will come ashore tomorrow. They'll discover him here. Oh, you think it's this detective come for him on account of the missing money! It isn't that which is killing him! It's the disgrace, Spotty—in their eyes. He can't stand it. It will be the last blow. Drink and despair are bad enough, but his good friends of the Service seeing him down and out—"

"He's never seemed to care a damn," murmured Spotty, watching her hungrily. A girl from Home—a pink-and-white one.



"Oh, you don't know! He's so proud, so sensitive. And you—he said, tonight, of all the men here, you'd been the only one who ever tried to help him."

"Me?" The Spotlight Kid stammered. "Why, he's bawled me out awful. A week ago he beamed me one when I tried to get him out of Dula's. Me help him?"

"With a word—a smile. You kept him from killing himself long before I came and found him. You, and your pictures."

"*Por el Amor de Dios!* My pictures? He panned 'em to a finish. The home news reels—he sneered at 'em. I was about to knock his block off every week for what he said of 'em."

"I know." She looked gravely at him. "But if you could just see. It was his home, too. He was trying to make you all think he was a foreigner—an Australian. He—every little flash of America hurt him so! Like a stab of a knife Spotty! Like—like—fingers pointing at him, accusing. Tonight, with all his sarcasm and jeering, he's crushed. Everything you showed on the screen from home was something smashing down his dream of a regeneration."

"He wants to make a comeback? He can't. That guy is gone. I've seen 'em before. The hot season and the *aguardiente*. He's done for. Besides, the dick has come for him."

"They can't prove it is he—if the fleet officers don't see that picture. And he disappeared while they were here. That officer couldn't get his extradition papers. And give him a chance! Oh, Spotty, he never stole that money! He was robbed at the racetrack. The Government will not prosecute if he could pay it back. Oh, if he had another chance, Spotty! Can't you help?"

The Kid watched her in the moonlight. Oh, if a guy had a girl like this one! To follow in his downfall, to plead for him. Well, there was only one bet—she must care a lot. The Kid almost grumbled. He'd like to put out his hand and touch her. To think that she was his. Just like a pal who'd wander the world with him.

"You want me to fade him out of that

picture? So his friends won't see. Don Rafael wants to show him up. That yalla hound has been bothering you, too. He'd stick a knife to me if—

"I thought maybe you could destroy that picture—"

"Would I? Why, say, little girl, I'd knock Hollywood a mile of studios for you!"

She looked queerly at him. His heart arose gallantly. Just what did that look mean, anyhow? The Kid, young and clean and cheery? And that barroom derelict—he couldn't come back—

"Look here, Mrs. Esterly," Spotty began suddenly, "you and me'll breeze through on this. You meet me on the *Embarcadero* outside the theater. I'll bring the film can, and you can junk it in the river. The Major's past has vanished. With a clean shave maybe he wouldn't be a bad *hombre*. I never saw him sober, so I don't know. Then suppose we shanghai him and send him somewhere before the dicks can arrange their papers?"

"If we only could! Oh, Spotty—you and I!"

"You and me." Spotty waved his hand to her on the *Embarcadero*. Say, a girl from Home, and her tears falling! But he'd made her smile! Why, this pest friend of hers—they would get him away, give him his chance somewhere. Then—well, who knew? Some sunny afternoon, Spotty might see this little widda in the grandstand and wave to her. Him in his college clothes, and all! An owner with a string of nags, and Mrs. Esterly would remember that Spotty had done the right thing for her friend down in that rotten hole. When he got to the dark little theater Spotty knew he was crazy about her. A pink one from Home. Well, play the pink to win!

He turned upon the *Embarcadero*, white and silent under the palm shadows from the Plaza to the fruit line wharves where the river glittered, opening to the Carib sea. But under the grimy whitewashed marquee of his theater, the Kid halted. The wide doors were open. A cigar glowed within. And as the Spotlight Kid stared over the dim rows of benches, he saw the leap of phantom figures to the screen.

He ran within and whirled to look up. Through the port came the dancing spotlight, and beyond he saw the yellow, broad face of the owner, Don Rafael, by the whirring magazines.

The Kid's glance went to the empty benches. There, half-way down, sat Brent of the United States department of justice.

The secret service man turned as Spotty reached him.

"Oh, you—the operator. The Don and I running this thing again. I want to spot that man surer. Going to study his face. Want the fleet officers tomorrow to point to him with absolute identification. Then turn this Señor Brown up for them. He can't get away anywhere even if he knows I want him."

"No," grunted Spotty. "Not a chance to the jungle."

He looked back uncertainly at the door. Mrs. Esterly would come, but no chance to steal that film can now! Fate had tricked them. Play the yellow to win!

The Kid stood staring at his screen. It was glowing now, with Home. The news reel, and first there flashed out an apple orchard of Yakima with the busy pickers. A New England girl with her prize Thanksgiving turkey. A dirty coal carrier locking down the Soo. A bunch of congressmen investigating a steal. Broadway,



the Atlantic City bathing beauties; the Texas rodeo, and Minnesota snows, the satin-skinned thoroughbreds passing the wire at Lexington—and then the Kid muttered, "Here they come—the gobs and leathernecks."

But they heard another voice behind them and Brent turned with him.

"So, that is America?"

The tall adventurer in the dirty whites stood in the aisle adjusting his monocle, the light from the curtain reflected on his white, gaunt face. He came on a step, and now Spotty saw that Mrs. Esterly clung to his shoulder. As the two passed she whispered.

"He followed me. I had him at my rooms and he wouldn't stay—"

Señor Brown swaggered past as if he did not know that Kid Larue and the detective were there. Down until his silhouette obscured the margin of the picture. The woman was pleading, and Señor Brown reeled a bit.

"He'll flop," muttered Spotty. "Riding on the end of his nerve." Then he swung up and back to the booth stairs. The yellow-faced *Comandante* grinned evilly when the Kid burst into the room.

"What the hell you doin'? I'm the operator here—"

"The owner can run a reel, can he not?"

Spotty dashed to the side port. He saw the three. Brent slumped in his seat; Señor Brown, gaunt and feverish, pointing at the screen; Mrs. Esterly sobbing on a bench before him.

For there was no mistaking what was to come. The derelict of the beach was holding forth the naked wreck of honor.

He would evade no more, fight no more, deny nothing. A defaulting American officer flaying himself with a grand gesture of cruelty. He would punish himself with a last agony.

And then came the merciless magic for which they waited.

A winter road and distant barracks. A flag so tiny that one could not make it out, and then a column of men swinging on, growing to gigantic stature, devil-dogs in full kit; leathery necks, and hobnails slogging the frozen dirt. Swinging on to pass a group of officers at the roadside.

And the flag was going by. The officer group was snapping to salute. A winter sky, a sky of Home—you could almost make out the features of the gray, clean, silent phantoms.

The Spotlight Kid was staring down. Brent had leaned forward in his seat. Mrs. Esterly's eyes were turned upward to Señor Brown who had come before the screen.

For he was saluting with a terrible gravity. As if to the man who had been, and now was not. Honor, there, clear-eyed, alert honor of an American officer. His honor! Now a ghost fading away from the picture. His own shadow, huge, grotesque, wavering, was blotting those fine phantoms. His hand raised again in salute—then they heard a cry.

Mrs. Esterly was springing toward his side.

The Kid could not see well what was happening, but Don Rafael suddenly laughed across the snapping spotlight behind the moving celluloid.

"This is very good. It saves the trouble, and he is out of my way—and the señora's. *Muchacho*, he is shooting himself—"

A pistol cracked down in the body of the theater.

Spotty whirled to face the *Comandante*. He just heard the satisfied laughter as the Don turned toward the control switch. Heard and turned, himself, from the stairway where he had started

The yellow to win?

Down midway in the dim theater, Brent

of the Secret Service, sprang up as the ghosts of home and yesterday vanished from the screen. He dashed back toward the stairs and up, for it appeared as if a million demons were swarming through the narrow projection ports of the booth. They were erupting searing light. Brent thought once he saw struggling figures over a machine upon which were descending swiftly exploding circlets of celluloid.

He fought to open the door which seemed locked. Then it burst wide, and a figure hurled itself into him, knocking him down the stairway. Someone who smelled of scorching flesh and cloth and who was choking in the deadly fumes of burning gun cotton and camphor compound.

"Out o' here," gasped the Spotlight Kid. "This dump is gone! You can't live in that stuff! The *Comandante*—he fired the film somehow. Oughtn't ever touched those magazines—and there goes a bad man gone good."

He leaped over Brent and ran forward down the aisle. The dick got up, gasped and retreated before the inferno of the burning projection booth. A man could not breathe on the stairs.

Kid Larue had dashed to Mrs. Esterly's side. Then he stopped, faltering. Señor Brown, tall and gaunt, stood quietly watching the fire above the main exit.

"Why, say," the Kid turned to her, "didn't he—?"

"I jerked his arm down. He was mad with fever and tried—"

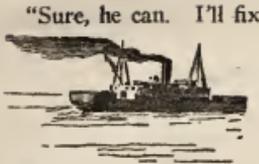
Spotty pointed at the screen cloth. "Major, I see what you hit. That hole would fit into a barrack wall about two thousand miles north of Swan Island wireless station. Wide shootin', Major. Come on, this gas'll get you. Oh, my little theater!"

He hurried them around behind the screen and out to the moon-flickering palms along the *Embarcadero*. Then across its dust to the wharves of the fruit line. The derelict soldier of misfortune muttered when the Kid dragged him near the water's edge between two galvanized metal warehouses. Somewhere came shouts and a gleam of red fire across the road.

"*El Comandante*," whispered Mrs. Esterly staring back.

"Never mind. There'll be a mob of spigs from the police hotfootin' in soon. And, Mrs. Esterly, this Major Hurd has got to go. On the fruit liner, see?"

"He can't. Oh, Spotty, I told you why!"



"Sure, he can. I'll fix it with Mooney. And Soledad Joe is waiting now with his skiff right under this wharf. Beat it!"

The tall man steadied to a grim dignity. "Old chap, I thank you, but really, you know—"

"Oh, drop that line with me, Major!" muttered the Kid tiredly. "Your pal, the little widda here, has put me next."

Mrs. Esterly laughed strangely, staring at Spotty. "Oh, you don't know yet! He can't go without repaying the money he lost. But if we only could! Beat that detective out with it! Oh, Allen would come back—we'd fight up in civil life. He would—I'd help him so!"

The Spotlight Kid began to stammer again to his pink lady.

"We? You, Mrs. Esterly—"

"I'm not Mrs. Esterly. I'm Mrs. Hurd. His wife, Spotty. I learned he was down here a month ago. I followed—to help—to try and save him, Spotty. Nobody knows at the Hotel. Only you—"

The Kid looked quietly at her. He hated art. And despised drama. Give him the real stuff, from life. He watched the tall man who shivered weakly with the drink, fever and despair. His restless eyes fixed on those far destroyer lights where honor and cleanness were in safe keeping. The Kid turned from him to the woman and sighed after some brief thought.

"Oh, well! No, I didn't guess. Must have been in kind of a dream. Only I thought you were a widda, and someday—Well, I thought maybe I'd see you—Home. You'd be up in the stand, and I'd own a fast one. We'd watch the goat scamper past carryin' the jack. Oh, well—no matter, Mrs. Hurd!"

She hardly knew what he was saying, for she was trying to still a sudden pitiful tremor of the broken man she loved.

The Kid blinked at the two. She must be grand, this pink one from Home. Her arms now, about the derelict, as if her faith, her love, could save a man after all.

"No, no, Esther," Hurd was whispering. "I can't go back." But he began to sob strangely with her. As if something had broken past his cynical stubbornness and savage hopelessness. A man must have fine honor to be so crushed at the stains upon it.

Hurd staggered from her caresses a moment, his hand out to the younger man.

"Spotty, old chap, I can't begin to tell you—what you meant to me—you and your pictures. You said it, boy—our land. But I can't go back. The officer can't take me, perhaps, but I wouldn't anyhow."

Spotty pressed his hand and dropped it. He turned to Mrs. Hurd. "Now, you see that ship? You two hop it. Passports? I got the grandest in the world! A hundred of 'em, with the mugs of a dozen presidents on 'em! Show 'em to Mooney—and turn 'em in at Washington. Fifteen grand—Uncle Sammy'd laugh his head off if he knew some ramblin', gamblin' wreck o' fortune turned the stuff back for him."

She failed to understand even when Spotty slipped his leather to Major Hurd's nerveless hand. Then, "Spotty! You mean—to send us home?"

"Tell Mooney to fix it. And say, pay that boy a hundred for me. He bet me a century I'd never do my comeback. He wins."

The old boatman awaiting Spotty Larue had poled his skiff to the landing ladder. Hurd's gaunt face watched it for an instant, and then when he tried to speak, he suddenly collapsed. The Kid caught him and lowered him to the thwarts. Then shoved the bankroll within his inside pocket.

"That's good. Saves a lot of fool talk. Mooney'll put him to bed. Goodby, Mrs.—Hurd."

"Oh, Spotty, we couldn't! And that detective—"

"I'm gamblin' again. That dick won't get a boat out o' here in two weeks. By that time the Major and you have fixed that account in Washington. All to the jake, then, you say."

She was half-way down the ladder and staring back up at him. The Spotlight Kid was laughing softly, blithely. "Listen. This stuff wouldn't do me any good. I'm a gamblin' fool back home. The game'd get it all in a month. But I'm backin' you—and him—to win."

"Spotty! You mean it? And, oh, come home some day—to us. We'll pay you back sometime—when we've fought up again!"

"All right. Sure, out of your first million—"

And because he was laughing again—at himself, but she thought it was at her—she turned a hurt, quivering face up to him.

His pink-and-white one was in tears; and the Kid knelt on the wharf as she

stood on the ladder below him. He put his hand under her chin and gently lifted her eyes to the moonlight.

"Just once. All my goodlookin' janes from Home have faded out of the picture—for me. So I just want to look at you once more—close up. That's all."

He watched old Soledad Joe's skiff fade into the moonwash.

He still sat on the wharf piling when dawn came over the misty Carib sea. The white fruit line ship had slipped out on the ebb and was turning north past the far, twinkling lights of the destroyers. Tomorrow they, too, would be homeward bound.

Someone came across the wharf planks behind Spotty, and grunted tiredly. Brent looked weary and disgusted.

"Why, say—operator! I told those damn flapfoot *soldados* that been diggin' in the ashes that you must have gone with the *Comandante*. They found him twisted to an ash in the melted gear of that picture machine."

"Well, you know those magazines had five thousand feet of celluloid in 'em. There's nothing burns faster except nitro."

"What happened to his niblets, anyhow? He fell on the arc, did he, and tangled the film back into it?"

"Say, you're a good guesser." Spotty smiled slowly. "Don Rafael flopped—must have got something wrong with his—heart.

Funny, ain't it? Many a time I told him to let my machine alone."

The Washington man watched him reflectively.

"Say, Bo, did I ever see you before? Around the tracks or the



training camps? I recall some job in New

Orleans when a bookie got nicked with a knife. The rail bird that did it just faded away—"

The Spotlight Kid laughed again. This reminded him, apparently.

He climbed off the piling and walked away from the detective to the end of the wharf. He took his clasp knife from its sheath and examined the point attentively. Then wiped it on a shred of coconut husk. Then he swung his arm back and pitched a fast one out over the surf-line toward the white ship homeward-bound. Really, what he threw had a fadeaway when it hit the water, and it made him remember that this month the Yankees would start spring training at San Antone.

And in April the fast ones would be shipping to the northern circuits to condition for the big summer racing.

"Oh, my little theater!" He came back grinning to the secret service man. "If I only had my little theater back, some of these hot nights, sometime, I'd see Babe lean against a fast one!"

"You must like it down Lere in this hole," mumbled Brent. "Now, this Señor Brown, hiding out—I can understand him. But a live bird like you, and there ain't a game you could get into here except the roulette at Dula's. Don't you ever think of pinching a roll and blowing home?"

"Who—me?" The Spotlight Kid's blue eyes widened humorously. "Why, I'm no gamblin' man! This Señor Brown, even he gyped me. And you, too. He'll cash a ticket he owes at Washington and then—"

"The devil you say!" yelled Brent. "How's that?"

"I won—on the red," murmured Spotty. "But he won—on the pink. I reckon the game was fixed against me. Well, there'll be fast ones and pink ones long after you and me have faded out of the picture. I wonder if I could beat that dirty tramp freighter down to Rio? Peelin' the spuds, or something?"

The complete novel in the next issue—

MOOSEMEADOWS

BY

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

A tale of haunting mystery among the New Brunswick backwoods



THE COW JERRY

The Adventures of a Wandering Texan

By GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Author of "The Baron of Diamond Tail," "Men of the Mesquite," etc.

A REGULAR COWTOWN YARN: TEXAS HERDS, KANSAS RANGES, FEUDS OF THE CATTLE BARONS, AND THE INEVITABLE WAR BETWEEN THE COWBOYS AND THE RAILROADERS—WHO COULD TELL IT BETTER THAN GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN? MOREOVER, THE HERO OF THIS TALE, ACCORDING TO REPORT, "WOULD WADE THROUGH A RIVER OF WILDCATS." SURELY HE NEEDS ALL HIS FIGHTING POWERS BEFORE THE LONG TRAINS BEARING HIS CATTLE MOVE SERENELY OUT OF THIS THRILLING STORY

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE TIME AND THE PLACE

MCPACKEN was not much of a name for a town, but it was the name of that town. Doubtless it was good enough for what it designated, for there is no question that there was a certain dry-salt substantiality in the sound, suggestive of corned beef and cabbage, with such concomitant comforts as railroaders especially favor, and road-weary men of the range swing down from dusty saddles to enjoy.

The town lay close by the sprawling Arkansas River, colloquially called the Arkansasaw, at a point where the Santa Fe trail of earlier days crossed that stream of deceptive shallows and wide-spreading bars of silt-white sand. Now another Santa Fe trail ran past its door, a trail wood-girded and steel-bound, whose roaring caravans made echoes among its

planked buildings, trailing scents of alluring opulence out of their precious freight, rushing eastward from the orange groves of distant California.

Other scents, true, streamed from less romantic trains which jolted and thumped through the town with shrieking flange on curve, grinding brakeshoe against laboring wheel; scents of an industry to which men one knew and met on the street laid their hands, home-binding, intimate smells such as only cattle trains leave after them to speak of another sort of opulence, truly Occidental. For McPacken was a town that had been established on cattle, and grown on cattle, and filled its stores and banks and homes and barber shops on cattle, from the very time that it welcomed the first dusty herd from Texas to its pens.

McPacken had lived and done well on the distinction of being the last loading-point to which Texas cattle were driven into Kansas for shipment to Eastern mar-

kets. It had not been permitted to boast long of this peculiar favor of changing conditions. The day of the Texas cattlemen who brought their beef to the Northern shipping-points on foot across a thousand miles of dusty trails, foraging them on the country as they passed, had come to an end shortly after the founding of McPacken on the Arkansas. The railroads had gone to Texas after the cattlemen's business, and the business of others along the way. Contrary to the expectations of everybody, the town did not die with the passing of the last driven herd.

Texas cattle had been brought to Kansas to fatten on its peculiarly succulent grass for many years before McPacken, and the railroad upon which it lay, graced that illimitable land. McPacken was a dot in the very center of the richest grazing country; chance had put it down at a place where each succeeding change seemed only to work its profit and contribute to its strength. Where herds formerly came to be loaded into trains, they arrived now on board of trains, to be dispersed among a hardy set of business adventurers known as feeders. These cattle were pastured along the broad river valley and brought to perfection for the butcher's block. On their day they were driven again to McPacken, loaded and shipped, their going and coming, their stay between, all leaving an accretion of profit in the town.

That was the reason for McPacken, and that was the way it grew. All that was



not so very long ago as time runs under the bridges along the Arkansas. There are men still s t u m p i n g around who rode after those long-h o r n e d herds of strang-

ers from the Nueces as young chaps, able yet to take care of a man's ration of steak with their own teeth. Some of them have foreheads extending to their crowns by now; many are grizzled and whiskered, and galled by the saddle of time, but most of them are going strong. Measured by events, it was a long time ago, for things move fast along the Arkansas; counted back by leap-years, not far.

At the time this parting in the pages of McPacken's history is made, the town was at its greatest consequence and prosperity as a center of the native and imported cat-

tle industry. It was the hub of a wide sweep of open range, into which only a few daring adventurers had pushed forward with fence and plow. These homesteads were mainly along the river, the occupants of them looked upon with a curious, questioning interest, not wholly unsympathetic, as people who lent themselves to some heroic, but misguided, experimentation, out of which little good to themselves or humanity at large could come.

This was the attitude toward all agricultural adventurers in the valley of the Arkansas at that time, shared by cattlemen and town dwellers alike. There was no hostility, no unfriendliness. Everybody would have been glad to see them succeed, but nobody expected them to do so. Their low sod houses were lonely markers to the cowboys who rode from distant ranges to McPacken; their struggles with oxen and lank teams against the tenacious sod a never-ending source of mild entertainment for those rovers of the prairies, who twisted in their saddles to look back as they galloped on to the town's delight.

Agriculture, it will be seen, then, did not contribute anything of consequence to the prosperity of McPacken in those days. The little which the people who followed that industry bought and sold in the town would not have been missed if it had been withdrawn entirely, for McPacken did not look to the earth for its supplies. It was a place that lived out of tin cans and bottles, and threw them down in the back yard when it had emptied them.

The railroad had established a division point there, with shops for emergency repairs to cars and engines, a roundhouse for stabling and grooming the steeds of the iron trail, and a system of water-works to serve these various enterprises. All of this, with the smoke and noise, gave the place a comfortably progressive atmosphere, in addition to adding to its citizenship many artisans, trainmen, engine wipers, and subsidiary attendants upon the aristocracy of railroad life.

There was the river, the railroad along its shore, where cottonwoods laced with wild grapevines made green refreshment for eyes weary of summer heat glimmering over vast prairie lands; beyond the railroad, McPacken. The town seemed to empty upon the railroad, as one river empties into another, its principal street holding the little red depot, like an island, in its mouth. One stood on the station platform and looked upon all the consequence

of McPacken, which was, no doubt, much greater than it appeared.

Beer kegs lay heaped in pyramidal pile on this platform at all times, if not empty ones waiting a train, full ones waiting a wagon. This pile of kegs seemed to be a proclamation to all who arrived, or lingered, or passed by, of the town's defiance, its aloofness in its wickedness from application of the commonwealth's laws.

Yet this was a wickedness of sullen defiance rather than one of lurid depravity; a wickedness that bribed county officials with the left hand while it dispensed beer with the right, practice common to Kansas towns of that time. Taking McPacken all over, it was not a bad town for its frontier situation. It had all the material, but never made much of its opportunity.

Between the railroad and the beginning of town there was a wide strip of unoccupied land, owned jointly by McPacken, the county and the "company" as that principal institution of the country was called. Here the county highway entered McPacken from the west, a road that ran past the small sod houses and stubborn farms and lost itself finally in the trails which split from the ends of it like ravelled strands of a larjat. It was a dusty, trampled gray stretch of beaten ground, with hitching-racks along the sides of the buildings which stood at the beginning of the principal thoroughfare. Prominent on the corner of this trampled common the Cottonwood Hotel stood, and in front of the hotel the place which concerned itself with beer kegs and defied the sovereign state.

That was the beginning of McPacken as one saw it from the railroad station: the hotel on the left, the saloon on the right. There were two cottonwood trees of considerable girth and spread of limb in front of the hotel, a pump and watering trough for horses between them. Here the sidewalk was double width, part of it being the hotel veranda, covered by a wooden awning to the curb.

Two benches, fixed solidly against the wall, flanked the door of the hotel, offering accommodations for no fewer than twenty loafers. At certain hours of the day these were filled, especially at evening, when the railroaders' day was done, and the withdrawing sun left it cool and pleasant there. Then Angus Valorous Macdougall, night clerk, dish washer, potato parer and waiter in a pinch, appeared with sprinkling can, gave the sidewalk planks a wetting down, leaving behind him

a pleasant odor of allayed dust, reminiscent of a shower.

At such hour the railroaders and chance guests from the range planted their chairs in the street and cocked back with feet on the sidewalk edge, where they viewed at pleasure the passing life of McPacken. That was the original motion picture entertainment, very popular in its day, in Kansas towns, and other towns, a great deal bigger than McPacken.

At the hour of this opening scene in McPacken, and on the veranda of the Cottonwood Hotel, there was very little wit and wisdom being discharged anywhere along the length and breadth of Santa Fe Street, as the main avenue was called. It was mid-afternoon of a withering hot summer day. Heat danced and wavered over the unpaved street, glimmered in distorting vexation above rails and ballast roadbed. There was a smell of jimson weed and fennel, and oil from the railroad, spiced with invigorating nip of cottonwood leaves like bitters in an insipid drink.

The sound of hammering came out of the railroad yards, where Orrin Smith, the section boss, was working his gang of terriers, putting in a switch. It was a deep, whirring, musical note, that of sledge on rail as some sweating jerry labored to bend the stubborn metal for the curve of the lead, yet subdued in that summer furnace, that vacuum of heat about which nature did not appear to concern itself at all, not even with a zephyr strong enough to turn a feather in the road.

Two figures enlivened the somnolent front of the Cottonwood Hotel this drowsy hour, side by side upon one of the benches flanking the open door. Even a stranger would have known, by her bearing of authority, that the woman was the boss of that concern, and that no man was boss of her.

Julia Cowgill was a quick and eager woman, rather meagre of frame, and tall, with a persistent prettiness in her gaunt face. Gray was stealing away her black hair, and she took no pains to hide the pecculation. There was a look of alertness and searching in her face, as if she lived a continual quest for something. Some said it was money; there were more



kindly souls who believed it was only rest.

The man beside her was not much of an example as men go, although he had a personality that generally drew a second look, especially when he spoke. He was a small man wearing a sandy little mustache; with a sharp little nose that seemed to have been pinched while in a plastic state. His head was broad, somewhat flat on top, well suited to the long line of parting and the cowlick that he had trained into his abundant black locks. A flowing crepe necktie adorned the low collar of his broad-striped shirt, the glory of which was not shadowed by either coat or vest.

There was a rich note in his voice that suggested a song; laughter seemed to lie so near the surface of him that he had only to open his mouth for it to appear in his eyes. For Banjo Gibson was a man who looked at life as a sort of one-sided joke, and humanity as an arrangement of comical figures paraded for his diversion. There was nothing much in him but a laugh.

"I'm glad to see you back again, Banjo," Mrs. Cowgill said. "I said to Goosie last night when I heard you talkin' to Angus, 'That's Banjo Gibson. I'll bet anything that's Banjo Gibson.' If I hadn't been so tired I'd 'a' slipped on something and come down."

"Just as well you didn't, pleased as I'd 'a' been to see you. I know how it is here at the hotel—your day's like a rubber sack; the more you put in it the longer it stretches."

"Yes, it's so long, and such worthless help in the dining-room. I had a girl out from Hutchinson—she flew up and quit me in the middle of supper yesterday because Bill Connor got fresh. Well, she said he did. I don't believe it."

"Little old Bill; I remember him well. They tell me he's got a run now?"

"Yes, he's makin' regular money. Him and Goosie they're engaged. Goosie she was so put out over what the little freckled flip-tail said about Bill I looked for her to throw his ring in his soup."

"Some people's born to make trouble," said Banjo, with discreet mental reservation bearing on Bill Connor's behavior toward the new girl.

"I wish I could put a man in, but them railroaders wouldn't stand for a man. They seem to think biscuit-shootin' is stric'ly a lady's job."

"It ain't a man's job," Banjo declared with feeling, "though I had to come down to it while I was gone. It was after that quack shook me up in Cheyenne."

"You mean to tell me you waited table, Banjo?"

"If you'd 'a' happened through Chadron, out in the sandhills of Newbrasky, about a year ago, you'd 'a' seen a feller back of the pie counter in the railroad eatin' house you'd 'a' thought was runnin' me a purty tight race for good looks."

"I'd like to 'a' seen you workin' at that job," Mrs. Cowgill said, the light of her toil-harried spirit in her eyes, a little smile showing at the corners of her large thin mouth.

"I'm thankful we was both spared the sight," Banjo said, with a deep sigh for a shame lived down if not forgotten. "I worked nights, and that helped some, handin' out slam sangwiches and coffee to the passengers that rushed the counter. After the last train we fed passed through, I didn't have anything to do but stand out pie ready for the freight crews. It wasn't much work, only the blowin' was hard on a man's lungs."

"Blowin'?" she repeated severely, in her way of putting a fresh guy in his place. "What do you mean, blowin'? To cool the pie?"

"No ma'am. I mean dust. That's what I mean. That's the sandiest land in creation, the wind blows so steady and hard you can lean up agin' it and go to sleep. They do, right along, up there in that country."

"Oh, you get out! I've heard the same thing said of Kansas, but I never saw anything do it but a horse."

Banjo laughed a little, more out of politeness than humor. Nobody likes to have a spike put in his joke.

"I used to parade up and down before them six pieces of pie," he said, "blowin' off the sand. Believe me or not, that ain't no lie. I never found any other way to keep them cuts of pie clean and eatable."

"Sprinklin' tobacker juice over 'em!" said she.

"I used to blow till I was blue in the face," said Banjo, but looked up to find Mrs. Cowgill was not so much as smiling. She was looking down the track where Orrin Smith was herding his jerries putting in the switch, sharp alertness bending her nice eyebrows together in a bunch.

"You're the beatin'est man, Banjo," she said, but there was little praise, less encouragement, in her tone for a man of humor such as Banjo Gibson, home from his adventures afar. A woman was crossing the railroad beyond Smith's gang. Mrs. Cowgill's interest was there.

"Where did you go from there?" she inquired, the woman having passed out of sight, leaving at least a divided portion of Mrs. Cowgill's interest behind.

"I rambled back to Wyoming; I had a lot of good friends in Wyoming. They're the dancin'est crowd of people up there you ever saw; kep' me fiddlin' till I nearly forgot how to pick a banjo at all. But places are so darned far apart in that country



it wears a man out travelin' around. I never would 'a' been able to make it around to all of 'em if a feller hadn't made me a gift of a horse, one of them little pinto horses with spots on him, the kind they call a calico horse back in Missouri."

"You must 'a' stood well with them, Banjo."

"Yes, I picked up more money there than I ever made before in my life, and I guess I could 'a' married one of them cow-girls and settled down, if I'd 'a' cared enough about any of 'em to take a chance. They're too big and wild for me, I'm here to say. They sling a man's heels off of the floor when they swing, and slap him to sleep if he gives 'em any slack. I like a girl my arm'll reach around, and I like 'em that can take a joke."

Banjo looked rueful; his tone was indignantly resentful.

"It might 'a' been better for you, Banjo, if you'd stayed up in that country and settled down on a ranch."

"Maybe I would if they hadn't got to shootin' the country up the way they're doin'. You've read in the papers about that rustlers' war they're havin' there, I guess? Darn reckless the way they're slingin' lead around."

"I heard some of the boys talkin' about it the other night. They said them Wyoming cowmen had sent out word to all the limber-jims on the range to come up there. I don't know how true it is, but there was a cowhand in here from the Cimarron yesterday on his way to Abilene, headin' for Cheyenne. That's what some of the boys said. I guess it's gettin' too peaceable and quiet in this country for some people."

"I'll take mine where a man can ride along the road at night with his girl without a swarm of bullets clippin' his hair," Banjo said, his deep voice vibrant with the moving memories of past perils. "They'd 'a' put a bullet through my fiddle if I'd 'a'

stayed in that country. Feller did slam one through my banjo-head one night when I was seein' a lady home from a dance. He said it was a mistake. Lot of good his 'pologizin' 'd 'a' done me if that bullet'd 'a' went through my gizzard. I left there after that."

"I don't believe there's been a shootin' here since you went away," Mrs. Cowgill said reminiscently. "Yes, I guess there was, too; some drunken cowhands killed a man that worked on a travelin' paint gang. But none of 'em didn't amount to anythin'."

"No man don't amount to much when he's got a hole drilled through his bellus," Banjo sighed.

"There's that woman again!" said Mrs. Cowgill, her voice sharp with resentful suspicion.

"Ma'am?" Banjo inquired, looking at her in startled surprise.

"Up the street, just comin' out of the Racket Store. She's been runnin' all over town today—she came in on Nine this morning. I'd like to know what she's up to, flippin' around that way."

One might have gathered from Mrs. Cowgill's hostile attitude that other women had come to McPacken in days past, and flipped around to the public detriment and Mrs. Cowgill's own personal embarrassment; and that she resented virtuously such invasion, mainly, if not entirely, on account of the stranger going about her mysterious business without first coming to the Cottonwood Hotel, which was a piece of unpardonable impertinence.

"I see her," said Banjo. "She's a peach!"

"She may be a punkin for all you know," Mrs. Cowgill rebuked him scornfully. She bore down on him hard, as if Banjo Gibson's erring judgment in the appraisal of ladies was a thing of notorious public cognizance, a mockery and a merry jest.

"Um-m-m-m!" said Banjo, deep in his chest, a safe and noncommittal sound.

"She's headin' here," Mrs. Cowgill announced, still severe, but a little mollified by the prospect of having her curiosity served at last.

The stranger's foot was on the porch.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL

HER way seemed hesitant and apologetic, for all the brave dash she had made from the door of the Racket Store. The flush that burned in

her face was not all due to the scorching heat that beat up, intensified by the reflection, from McPacken's dust-white street as she stood an indecisive moment a little distance from Mrs. Cowgill and Banjo Gibson, seated in comfort on the green bench beside the hotel door.

"Was you wantin' to see somebody?" Mrs. Cowgill inquired, turning casually, feigning a business interest that she did not feel, suppressing a greater one that she would not confess.

"I'm taking subscriptions for a work—a book—this book," the girl said, appealing from face to face with serious brown eyes. "May I sit here a little while and tell you—show it to you?"

Mrs. Cowgill moved along a little, although there was ample room at her end of the bench, signifying by the shift that the stranger was to sit beside her, and not by the side of Banjo Gibson. Banjo found it necessary, for decorum and comfort, to edge along a little way himself, putting a space of half a yard between himself and the hostess of the Cottonwood Hotel. It was not quite far enough to give him a view beyond her; he shifted a yard more, pretending that his shoestrings needed tightening, turning up his eyes in sly measurement of the girl's obvious good points as he leaned.

Banjo was confirmed in his first opinion by this adroit exploration. To look at her was refreshment; to be near her a placid joy.

Banjo did not hold it against her that she stood at least a hand's breadth taller than himself, being accustomed by this time to the handicap that nature had placed upon him, but slewed in respectful attention on the bench to look at her across Mrs. Cowgill.

The girl was holding a dumpy thick book with red cover and black lettering clasped in both hands. "It's called A Thousand Ways To Make Money," she said, looking in an appealing way from face to face.

Mrs. Cowgill took the book from her. She held it in her hand unopened, gazing at it steadily and silently. Presently she turned to the agent, who smiled in timid expectancy.

"Was you in there tryin' to sell Jake Smolinsky one of them books?" Mrs. Cowgill demanded, rather than inquired.

"If you mean that little old man that makes a noise like a clock going to strike, I was," the agent confessed, the smile go-

ing from her lips, a sort of comical solemnity taking its place.

"Well, child, a thousand ways to make money wouldn't be more than half as many as Jake Smolinsky knows already," Mrs. Cowgill said, softening in her judgment, as Banjo was glad to see.

The lady agent sighed. "It looks like the rest of the people in this town are just about as smart as he is," she said.

"You didn't sell a book all the time you've been runnin' around in this broilin' sun?"

"Not a one," the agent replied, but brave in her failure, Banjo could see; no tears within a mile of her.

"I suppose anybody ought to be glad to know a thousand ways to make money," Mrs. Cowgill reflected. "How much does it cost?"

"Only two dollars. And immediate delivery"—hopefully. "No wait."

"Two dollars for a thousand ways to make money!" Banjo marveled over the bargain. "And I'd nearly give my l—my ankle, for one sure-shootin' way."

"If you'd like one of the books, sir," the lady agent said, leaning to look at him.

"Well, hum-m-m-m! Two dollars, hum-m-m-m!" Banjo turned it off with his noncommittal rumble and let it rest. Two hard dollars in the jeans were better, maybe; more certain, without a doubt, than a thousand theories for making more in a little red book with black letters on the back. For, if they were legal ways they were ways involving work, a condition for obtaining money to which Banjo Gibson was unalterably opposed.

"Did you ever sell any of them books anywhere?" asked Mrs. Cowgill.

"Yes, I've sold a good many—about fifty-three, I think. I've got a good many left, though—over at the depot in my trunk."

"Where did you start from, child?"

"Hutchinson."

"How long ago?"

"About two months."

"And you've only sold fifty-three, clearin' maybe a dollar on a book?"

The lady agent nodded assent, slowly.

"It takes you a long time to find out you ain't got even one way to make money," Mrs. Cowgill said, but rather more in admiration than pity or reproof.

"I've never been whipped, I never will



bel!" the lady agent declared very resolutely.

"Some people's that way," Mrs. Cowgill said, nodding her head as if she understood the trait very well. "I wish somebody— Where are you headin' for from here?"

"I'm heading in here, as the railroad men say, I guess. If I can't sell any books, I'll have to stay."

"Ever teach school?"

"No, but I could. Is there an opening here?"

"I don't know. I don't suppose they've hired the teachers yet, it's nearly two months before school opens. I just wondered, you look so young for a travelin' book agent I thought you might be a teacher workin' through vacation. How did you come to take up sellin' books?"

"I guess I was talked into it. I bought the western half of Kansas for a hundred dollars."

"You paid too much, even if you got a deed," said Banjo.

"I believe you," the lady agent agreed, leaning over in her attentive way to look at him fairly as she spoke.

"Just for the right to sell them books out here?" Mrs. Cowgill asked.

"That's the scheme. I paid another hundred dollars for a hundred books, put them in my trunk and started out."

"Where from, honey?"

Banjo was pleased to see Mrs. Cowgill softening more and more. How that girl could go tramping around Kansas with books to sell, or anything to sell, and not run out of stock in a week, was a mystery to him.

"I started from Kansas City."

"What was you doin' there before you bought in on that fool book?"

"I suppose I might as well tell you," said the girl, turning frankly to Mrs. Cowgill. "A person can't be a mystery in a little town, especially when she's got to find a job. I wasn't doing anything before dad went broke in the real estate boom. Then I sold some of my trinkets to raise the money I blew on the books. And that's all there is to tell, except my name."

Mrs. Cowgill waited, perking up a little with expectancy, to receive it.

"Louise Gardner," the girl introduced herself. "Maybe that's it, and maybe it isn't."

"That ain't nobody's business but your own," Mrs. Cowgill granted with easy indifference.

"That's right!" Banjo declared with strong emphasis. He seemed ready to stand in defense of her name, true or false, against all aspersion and doubt.

"You never waited table," Mrs. Cowgill said. She spoke as if the young woman had neglected a duty or an opportunity, at least.

"I could do it. Is there a job here? Do you want a girl?"

"I can only afford to pay five dollars a week, room with my daughter—she's about your age. It may not look like much, but it beats trampin' around in the hot sun."

"Not anything like it," said Louise Gardner.

"I'll not say it ain't heavy and hard while it lasts, but the rush don't last long."

"That will be all right," Louise said cheerfully.

Banjo looked at her queerly. What did she mean? Was she going to take that job?

"There's time for a girl to do her washin' and sewin' in the afternoon," Mrs. Cowgill seemed to argue for the place that she had to be filled, just as if the candidate held back instead of sitting keen and hopeful, a new light bright in her eyes.

"That will be fine!" Louise declared. "I'm ready to begin right now."

CHAPTER III

GOOSIE AND OTHERS

ODESSA COWGILL, commonly called Goosie, was a sentimental young lady who played the parlor organ. When Louise Gardner first met her she was singing a mournful song as she laid out cutlery on the long table where the regulars assembled, at so much a week, to replenish their fires and keep up a head of steam for the railroading life.

There is no doubt that suds, and soup, and steaming dishes of a boarding house where heavy railroad fare is served, do not contribute an atmosphere for aesthetic development. If beauty thrives in such environment it must of necessity be rugged. That was the order of Goosie; big, broad-faced, boisterous and strong.

She was a hearty, happy girl, with a big-spreading mouth, who enjoyed deeply the sad songs of separation, broken faith and blighted homes which were current in that



day. Her greatest pleasure was to sing them when her duties threw her alone, as now. It was her melancholy enjoyment at such times to put herself in the heroine's part, with Bill Connor, the fireman to whom she was engaged, standing off in a dim and tearful background, holding out appealing hands, watching her drift hopelessly to ruin and desolation.

She knew that Bill would, in plain and unromantic action, take her by the neck and choke it out of her in such case. That's all the sentiment there was in Bill. Yet it gave her a dear diversion, a serene, sad happiness, to figure Bill off in the background holding out his hands. She shivered in unhappy ecstasy.

Gosie's mother broke upon her song, bringing the strange girl into the shadowy dining-room.

"Gosie, this is Louise Gardner, the new dining-room girl. Louise, this is Odessa, my daughter. Gosie's her pet name; she's been called by it so long she wouldn't hardly answer to any other by now."

Gosie put down the undistributed cutlery, offering her hand with frank equality. "Hello," she said. "When did you come in?"

"I came on the Nine this morning," Louise returned with the readiness of a regular railroader.

"Take her to the room and let her fix herself up. You'll have to lend her some of your aprons till she can get some made."

Gosie led the way to the stairs, which came down beside the door connecting dining-room and office, vastly relieved to know she was going to have help that hot evening, eager to get the new girl out into a strong light to see if her complexion was really as good as it looked.

Mrs. Cowgill turned to the kitchen, from which a moaning, long-drawn note of lamentation sounded, as if somebody there labored in a bondage that rent the heart to bear. A tall spare negro woman was standing at the stove frying chicken. She turned at Mrs. Cowgill's approach, her prolonged note diminishing, falling away, like the whistle of a fast-running train rounding a woodland curve. The cook grinned, her solemn face glistening with sweat.

"I done got all the chicken on, Mis' Cowgill," she said.

"You'd better go out and cool off a while when you take it up, Rachel," Mrs. Cowgill suggested, with a sort of reticent, grudging kindness.

"I ain't none so hot," Rachel replied

cheerfully. "Druther have it hot than them cold winter days when the win' snoops under the doo' and gives me the rheumatis' in my legs and the misery in my back."

"Ain't Angus come down and started on them putaters yet?" Mrs. Cowgill inquired sharply.

"Yassum, he's out there on the po'ch josselin' 'em around, playin' train like he's always a doin'."

Mrs. Cowgill set her foot against the screen door, which had fringed paper tacked along the top to make a commotion among the flies waiting a chance to wing into that paradise of alluring scents. It was equal to opening the door against a driving rain; some of it was bound to get in.

Mrs. Cowgill let the door close gently, to stand beside it with displeasure coming over the strained look of worryment and longing in her tired face. Angus Valorous Macdougall was sitting on the edge of the shady porch twenty feet or so beyond her, a large bucket of potatoes beside him, a pan to receive the pared ones standing a little way along. Between bucket and pan Angus had a string of the humble vegetables stretched out like a line of freight cars, headed by an immense potato with a protuberance that served for the engine's smokestack.

Angus Valorous was chuffing and hissing equal to any switch engine between Argentine and McPacken as he pushed his little train slowly along, entirely absorbed in the pastime, so childish and ridiculous for one of his growth and years.

"Is that what I pay you for?" Mrs. Cowgill broke out in wrath, her voice rising sharp and high.

Angus Valorous started guiltily, ashamed of being caught in the indulgence of a pleasure that he should have left behind him with his knee pants, unconscious, no doubt, in his rather thick-headed and totally unimaginative way, that his overwhelming ambition was only illustrating itself in this homely concrete form. Angus Valorous lived for nothing in life but to be a conductor. That ambition was in his round soft head when he was born; it was in his round hard head now that he was nineteen, and big enough to be thirty-nine. He scrambled the potatoes toward him, let-



ting some of them fall, confused and red behind the ears.

"Is that what I pay you for?" Mrs. Cowgill demanded again, coming forward in long strides as if she meant to assault him. "Don't you know we have supper in this hotel at six o'clock? You great big good-for-nothing lump of mutton!"

"Aw, keep your shirt on!" Angus retorted, twisting his head to scowl at her, growling from the corner of his mouth. "All you're payin' me ain't goin' to break nothin' but your heart! If you don't like it you can git another man!"

Angus spoke in explosions, great sarcasm in his tone, great contempt in the slewing of his mouth. He threw down his knife, and stood facing Mrs. Cowgill, jerking at the strings of his coffee-sack apron as if through with the job.

Angus was a short-built young man, heavy in the thighs, his shoulders thick, his arms short and strong. His black hair was brushed to such a polish that a spider would have needed a hand-line to climb it. His face was round and boyish, his little snub nose quite comical in the midst of his present bluster. But for the black whiskers which crowded his fair ruddy skin, so thick and so fast-growing that no amount of shaving could keep them out of sight, Angus would have looked in the face like a hearty, full-blooded boy of twelve. As it was, he looked twelve, with the whiskers of forty-five.

He was the son of Doctor Macdougall, one child of many children. Doctor competition was sharp in McPacken; Angus had been crowded out to shift for himself when he should have been finishing the grade school. He could not get a job as brakeman—even conductors, in their consequence and grandeur, must begin there—until he became twenty-one. The Cottonwood Hotel was a very good place to fill the intervening years, which Angus had breasted until only two now stood between him and his happy day of matriculation in the college of conductors.

It was the habit of people native to McPacken, as well as those of transplanted stock who remained in its atmosphere a little while, to be outspoken and independent. A superior might be acknowledged on a job, scorned and condemned for the pull that put him there, but in no other connection, social or civil. Angus Valorous was simply living up to the standards of McPacken when he bristled before Mrs. Cowgill and stood on his rights as a man. If he had acted other-

wise he would have been despised, not alone by the men of McPacken, but by the women and children, and Mrs. Cowgill first of all.

"Aw, go ahn!" said Angus, jerking at his apron-strings. "Go ahn! If you want somebody else to do your dirty work for you, go and git him. That's ah! I got to say!"

Mrs. Cowgill stood regarding him in towering scorn, knowing very well that Angus had no more notion of quitting than she had of discharging him.

"Whatever sense you had when you was born leaked out of you before they could bring a teacup to catch it in!" she said. "Go to work, and don't give me any more of your slack!"

To relieve Angus of the necessity of carrying his bluff any farther, and to save her own dignity in the bargain, Mrs. Cowgill left him with that humiliating aspersions. She marched through the kitchen and dining-room, heading for the office, from which she heard the faint tinkle of the little desk bell. She was in no hurry to attend the caller; as she went along she speculated on whether it might be a cow-hand wanting a cigar, or a railroader a plug of tobacco, or an agent wanting to sell something, or some fool that didn't know what he wanted. She was by natural bent a little uncharitable in her estimation of mankind.

As she passed the wash-room—fitted with modern plumbing, supplied with water by the railroad water works—she stopped at the sound of a snorting ablu-tion, familiar in her ears.

"Is that you, Myron?" she called.

"Yup," a soapy, cheerful voice replied.

"What're you doin' home this time of day?"

"Run out of shingles," the soapy voice replied.

"Wasn't there any more in the lumber yard?"

"Schudy broke a wheel, couldn't get 'em over till morning, honey."

"Well, when you're through wastin' water in there you go on out and saw up some of them ties."

"Yes, pet."

Mrs. Cowgill went on to the office. Myron Cowgill, under the shadow of whose name the hotel lady lived, came from the wash-room damp and uncombed, with towel lint in his long brown mustache, a cheerful, even a glad, light in his mild blue eyes.

Myron produced the bowl of a corn-cob

pipe from a pocket of his bagging overalls, tapped it in his palm to dislodge the shingle nails; brought the stem of it out of the ruler pocket along his leg, connected the parts and fired up. Pipe in mouth, he went out through the kitchen to begin operation on the gritty, hard oak ties which the thrift of his wife secured, through a pull with the roadmaster, to supply fuel for her kitchen range.

Mrs. Cowgill heard the summons of the little bell again as she paused at the foot of the stairs to call Goosie. She resented the insistent ring; there was something imperative about it that seemed to place her in an inferior position. She went along deliberately, turning her eyes on this and that, making out that she came casually. She wanted the bell-ringer to understand that she was a necessity in McPacken, not a convenience.

The insistent ringer of the little desk bell was no less important person than Verney Carr, station agent, in his white shirt and pink sleeveholders. Mrs. Cowgill put off her resentment, edging around the counter with a smile. Verney was an important railroad peg in McPacken. He was not the man to call her out without sufficient reason.



"There's a big stock extra in five sections coming," the agent announced without preliminary greeting. "They're bringin' three thousand head from Texas, over west of the Brazos where they've got a big drouth."

"I've heard the cowmen talkin' about it," she nodded.

"First of a lot of 'em, they say," the agent said. "I thought you might want to make some preparations for takin' care of the bunch that'll be comin' with them five extras."

"I'll have Myron kill some more chickens. Thanks, Verney."

"They're goin' to flood this country with them Texas cattle. They'll eat these cowmen up here holler."

"This range'll take care of just so many, and no more, I've heard the cowmen say. The Texas men have to lease from them, you know, Verney, or pay so much a head by the month for usin' their grass. I guess it's a good thing for our people, all

them cowhands comin' in here, too. They'll spend their money here in town."

"And raise hell at all hours." The agent spoke like a man with unpleasant recollections.

"It'll liven things up," Mrs. Cowgill said. "McPacken will be more like it was when I came here and opened the hotel. There's no harm in them Texas boys if you take them right."

"I know I've got one sweet time ahead of me!" the agent said with what seemed unwarranted feeling. "They'll be all night unloadin' them five trains—the first one's due to arrive about seven."

"I'll take care of 'em as long as they come. We've got to go out of our way to serve the cattle trade."

"Everybody in this country has to," the agent said, with anything but pride or ease of dignity in his part of the service.

"It's the business that counts; there wouldn't be anything here without it."

"Oh, I don't know about that," the agent said loftily. "I'm gittin' darn sick of seein' these spider-legged cowhands under sombrero hats with guns hung around on 'em. Don't ever shoot anything with 'em, not even themselves."

"A gun's about the same to them as a watch is to a railroad man, Verney."

"A railroad man needs his watch, but no man needs a gun slung on him in this country."

"It's custom, more than anything. The boys wouldn't look the same without their guns. I'd kind of hate to see them go. But some of them are. I saw Cal Withers ride by a little while ago with only one gun on him. I remember when he used to carry two, and a knife."

"Darned old fool! This bunch of cattle's comin' consigned to him. He's been gettin' messages all afternoon."

"It's a handful for Cal if he's bought 'em. I hope he don't go broke again."

"Lot of his men with their toy pistols swingin' on 'em rode in a while ago to receive the cattle. I'll have to be right there on the spot till the last car's empty."

"Too bad," Mrs. Cowgill said indifferently. "Much obliged for comin' over to tell me, Verney." She brought a box of her best brand of cigars from the showcase. The agent picked two with critical deliberation. For such services as this to the Cottonwood Hotel, his smokes cost him nothing.

"Wild bunch," said the agent, turning to go back to the red depot and await the arrival of the vexatious Texans.

"Men, or animals?" she laughed.

"Both," the agent answered over his shoulder from the door.

CHAPTER IV

A TEXAS MAN

THERE was nothing in common between the railroaders of McPacken and the cowhands who rode in to refresh themselves with its shabby entertainment. Even the most prominent drovers, some of whom risked more in one season's speculation with the caprices of nature and the markets than the combined railroaders of McPacken earned in a year, were looked upon with a sort of patronizing tolerance by conductors and brakemen when they loaded for Kansas City and rode in the caboose on stock-shippers' passes.

The railroaders prided themselves that the world came to McPacken every day. If it did not always stop and get out for a look around, it roared through with an up-swirling of dust that made its passing all the more important. The latest slang was ready in the mouths of the railroaders; they could make sport of cowmen and cowhands in an unknown tongue.

A superior caste to range men and grangers, according to their own rating, these railroaders of McPacken. Yet every one of them was serving cattle, living and prospering on cattle. But for cattle they would not have been there at all.

Peace generally prevailed between railroad and range, although an outbreak came now and then. There was no public dance-hall in McPacken, that being an institution belonging to the days before the town's beginning, but there was the big saloon with its three beer-jerkers on busy nights and Sundays, where the soil was always raked for the seeds of trouble.

It was the custom still to carry guns on the range in those days, a habit that had become a tradition, rather than a necessity. The railroaders, with few exceptions, stuck weapons in their hip pockets when going out for the evening. Railroad taste favored that style of weapon known as bulldog, on account of its short and chunky build being adapted to gentlemanly concealment. It was considered boorish in railroad society to make a show of one's weapon, but there were men enough with guns stuck around them in McPacken every night to line up a considerable battle. That such general engagement between railroad and range

never had taken place was the marvel of all peaceable citizens.

There were staid and respectable railroad men who had their families and homes in McPacken, who neither mingled in the swilling nor mixed in the barroom brawls, forerunners of the substantial respectability that railroad men, as a class, came in time to enjoy. In those days, especially out on the edge of things as in McPacken, a railroader was a man with a reputation for roughness, a notoriety that he fully enjoyed and sustained. In McPacken they were young men, mainly; car repairers, wipers, switchmen, machinists, brakemen and firemen, who had a pride in their calling, a glowing satisfaction in their generally hard name.

On the other hand there were the cowhands, as the men who followed the herds were commonly called in and around the town. Several hundred of them could have been rounded up within a three-days' ride of McPacken, youngsters full of cayenne and vinegar, with a snort and go to them such as free youth has in any calling, anywhere. There was a sprinkling of older men among them, hardy, wiry ones who had ridden the long trail from Texas to Montana, following slow herds over perilous ways.

Things were coming easier to the cowboy gentry in those McPacken days. The railroad was no longer a thousand miles away; lights and liquids were within three or four days' ride, at the farthest. These encroachments of civilization had shown their influence on the cowboy habit, which was growing somewhat gentler, due to frequent breaks, perhaps in the long periods of drouth, or maybe coming of the fact that something easy to procure is no longer ardently desired. Whatever the cause, the effect was apparent to the older citizens of McPacken, who had recollections of times not very far back when revellers made night a torture in the town.

Altogether, the effect of business methods, which were supplanting the old-time make-or-lose gamble of cattle raising, were showing amazing results, not alone in the taming down of cowboys, but in stabilizing an industry left hitherto dependent on chance. This worked out to



the advantage of McPacken and all within it. More cattle, more railroaders; more railroaders, more money turned loose every pay-day to make everybody glad.

Mrs. Cowgill was pleased to hear of the five trains coming into her port with cattle from the burned-up range of Texas. Every carload brought in lean meant something more than a carload to go out again fat in the fall. More trains, more lay-over men for the Cottonwood Hotel. It was all very comfortable and satisfactory as Mrs. Cowgill contemplated the future, near and far, standing there where the station agent had left her, with arms across the pages of the open register.

She turned over in her mind the chance of the cattle trains arriving when the agent expected them, knowing the ways of such trains as well as any railroader. She concluded at last to spare Myron the slaughter of more chickens. The trains would not begin to get in before nine or ten o'clock. More than likely, out of a misguided sense of loyalty, the Texas cowhands would peg on up the street and get their supper in the Lone Star Cafe.

While Mrs. Cowgill was revolving these thoughts, and arriving at her wise conclusions, the nearest of the five cattle trains was still a hundred miles distant from McPacken. On top of this train, back a few cars from the engine to give the cinders a chance to cool before they hit him, a young man was sitting, his prodpole between his knees, watching the Kansas landscape as the train jogged by.

Tom Laylander was favorably impressed by the state. They had left the region of elms and maples along the streams, the dark-green fields of corn, and mellow stubble-lands where wheat shocks stood amazingly thick, it seemed to him, accustomed to the thin yields of that sandy post oak land beyond the Brazos. Now they were passing through a paradise of prairies, big enough, it seemed, to pasture all the starving herds between the Panhandle and the Big Bend. It was an empty country, as far as he could see, shaggy with gray-green short grass, heaved in gently-rounded hills that looked like the backs of gigantic buffalo. It looked like a place where a man might turn out his herd with nobody to set bounds to his coming and going.

Tom Laylander knew that it was not so; that men of his calling had all that country under their control, in one way or another; that bounds were set and respected, and that a stranger with five hundred-odd starving cattle, such as the thirty cars in

that train of his contained, must go where he was apportioned and pay what he was asked. Better than starving down on the Brazos, he reflected; better than hanging on there, hoping for the rain that had been nearly three years in coming, except an aggravating shower now and then.

The bones of many a herd whitened that sandy country, set with its tenacious, never-dying post oak trees; hundreds of his father's cattle had gone in that miserable way while the old man had hung on in the belief that his losses would not equal the expense of running away from the drouth, hoping for the rain that never before had played him quite such a disastrous trick.

It had broken the old cowman at last, and put him in his grave. Young Tom had picked up what was left and set out for Kansas, in the hope that he might save enough to return to Texas after the drouth was broken, and start another herd. Kansas was a good place to retreat upon in the day of necessity, but Texas was the only place to live. The only place, because it was the only place he knew.

Calhoun Withers, the biggest cattle speculator in the southwest, had come into that famine-stricken neighborhood and pretty well cleaned it up at his own price. It was a bone and hide price, Withers had said. That was all the cattle of that country were worth. His purchases were coming along behind Tom Laylander, twenty-five hundred head or more.

Withers, as an old friend of Tom Laylander's father, had advised the young man not to sell at these famine prices. There was going to be a shortage in cattle, with good prices as a consequence, that fall, owing to the unfitness of the Texas supply for the butcher's block. Load, he advised, and ship to Kansas, where he had range to rent at a reasonable figure.

Tom had been in the mind for this all along, and here he was on his way to gamble with Kansas for the remnant of his herd. He had arranged to pay Withers by the head for the use of his range, settlement to be deferred until the cattle were sold. It was the young adventurer's hope that his bones and hides would become beeves in the course of three or four months.

Mrs. Cowgill woke in the night to hear them unloading the cattle into the white-washed pens, the high-pitched tremolo of man and steer sounding lonesome as the plaint of creatures which belong by right to wide and distant places wailing in the

dark for home. There always was something in that wild cowboy note more of melancholy than jubilation to Mrs. Cowgill's ear. Like coyotes, she often thought, shivering and howling in hunger of a winter night in bleak places among the snow. Why this thought always came to her with the sound she did not know; only that it was so.

It was evening before Laylander got his herd across the river and spread in the green and abundant valley. The cattle were being held there for their first feed on Kansas grass, by two cowboys who had accompanied Laylander from Texas. They were mounted on horses borrowed from Withers.

Tom's intention was to pay these boys off as soon as they had worked the herd out to the range he was to occupy, and let them go back home or find employment in Kansas, as they might elect. He planned

to do his own herding, such as might be necessary. Withers had said he could handle the cattle alone on that range, where the feeding was so plentiful they did not travel far.



Laylander wanted to sniff bay rum, and feel the barber's shears around his ears once more. It seemed a long time since he had enjoyed those luxuries; his beard felt long enough to hide a rabbit. He was greatly cheered by his hopeful outlook as he rode one of Withers's horses to Mc-Packen to leave his mane and tail, as he said, in the barber shop.

The regular boarders in the Cottonwood Hotel took their meals at a long table that extended in state down the middle of the dining-room. Casual guests, such as drummers and cowhands, did not share this table d'hote. Goosie Cowgill, who usually combined the duties of reception committee and waiter, piloted them to the small side tables, at which two or four might sit in such comfort as the stale pie-crust atmosphere of the dining-hall offered.

The railroaders and other regulars were pretty well cleared out of the dining-room when Tom Laylander arrived. Goosie, being engaged in an exchange of wit with the roundhouse foreman, did not see the hesitant stranger as he paused with a question that amounted to an apology for his

intrusion, near the door. Louise Gardner, who had taken to her new job with confident alacrity, caught the arrival's eye and beckoned him on with hearty signal.

"Back up!" said a brakeman, who saw the signal from his place at the long table.

The few others at this common board looked up from their various engagements and laughed. The brakeman, his essay as a humorist thus approved, repeated the sign, looking across at Tom Laylander, who stood in confusion, his big hat in his hand.

"She wants you to make a couplin' with that flat down there on the house track," the brakeman explained.

Laylander grinned, going on to the table where the new biscuit-shooter waited, a chair pulled out to receive him.

"Oh, leave her alone," Goosie laughed. "You was green once yourself."

"Who's green?" The brakeman feigned a large surprise. "That girl learnt biscuit-shootin' in college. They've got a class of 'em down at Lawrence."

"What're you sore about, Windy?" the roundhouse boss inquired with patronizing contempt. "Did she step on your steak?"

"Ya-a, y' clinker-puller!" the brakeman sneered.

"A little shack got his neck broke in Argentine last week, tryin' to stretch himself out to pass for a man," the roundhouse boss returned, his sarcasm sharper than any knife on the table.

While this passing of pleasantries across the table between the railroading caste was going on, Louise was taking stock of the customer bound for her table. It seemed to her that a window had been opened to the broad prairies, admitting a cool wind with the soft, indefinable scents of lonely places in it, there was such a frank confession of unworldliness in this young man's face.

It was a plump face, boyish, ruddy through the brown of wind and sun, freckled a little in keeping with the sandy hair. The young man came walking on his toes, as if afraid he might disturb somebody, his gun against his thigh, spurs tinkling on his freshly polished boots. His scarlet neckerchief made a fine effect along with the tawny gray of his cougar-skin vest, both of them carried from Texas in his gripsack on top of a cattle car, reserved for an hour such as this.

He was a tall and slender youth, younger in appearance than in fact, as the new biscuit-shooter could see, yet with something of competence and assurance in his

forehead, rather narrow and combative; and in his blue eyes, small, with light lashes peculiarly noticeable, arched by sandy eyebrows as delicate and long as a girl's.

The young Texas man took off his revolver before seating himself, hanging it on the back of his chair, in respect to the hospitality of that house, perhaps, or maybe in observance of the ancient custom among armed men when they sat down together to bread. Whatever the purpose or the prompting, Louise Gardner thought better of him for the act. She seemed to get a little look into his simple ethics, and to find them strongly enforced by honor, a quality that did not speak from the faces of many who filled their bunkers at Mrs. Cowgill's board.

As for Tom Laylander, he felt that he had been served a banquet even before Louise brought him the bread and butter. He felt so glad he wanted to whoop. He thought it must be because he was away off up there in a strange country, kind of lonesome and cold around the gills, and she had spoken to him in that friendly, understanding way.

He looked after her when she went to the kitchen, carrying her tray beside her in the way he had come in carrying his hat. He just sat and looked, drawing in his breath.

Tom was not more than half through his supper when one of the men that he had left with the cattle came in looking for him, breathing hard as if he had run across the river, excitement pushing out his eyes. Louise saw Laylander rise at the first hurried words and buckle on his gun. He picked up his hat and started for the door; stopped, seeming to consider the situation, the cowboy arguing earnestly, hand on the young man's shoulder, as if to stop him in some unwise design.

Presently Laylander returned to his supper, the cowboy with him. Louise noted, as she served the other man, that his news had filled Tom; he did not seem to have room for another bite. It was indigestible news; it had brought a cloud to the young man's clear eyes, a lowering, portentous shadow over his good-humored face. Louise hoped it might not be as bad as his face reflected it, whatever it might be. She moved his plate aside and slipped the pie before him. He thanked her with his eyes, but did not touch the pie.

The cowboy finished his hastily gobbled meal and left in as much of a hurry as he had come, plainly on the young drover's order. Laylander buckled on his gun

again and stooped to get his hat from under the table, where it had been kicked in the excitement of the conference.

"Don't you like pie?" Louise inquired, coming forward with her tray.

"Yes, ma'am, I love it," Laylander replied, red from the stooping for his hat, and something more. "But I just got some news that kind of took away my appetite for pie, if you'll excuse me, ma'am."

"I noticed it. You're one of the Texas boys that came in with the cattle last night, aren't you? I hope it wasn't about your cattle, stampeded or something?"

"It was about my cattle, ma'am," Laylander replied, his eyes on the door, the desire big in him to be gone.

"I'm sorry," she said, her hands busy among the dishes, her eyes lifted for one sympathetic glance. "I used to hear so much about the foolish things cattle do on the range——"

"They wasn't to blame, ma'am," he corrected her with grave courtesy. "I've been turned a trick——"

Louise saw him stiffen as for a jump, his words broken off there and left hanging. Mrs. Cowgill was bringing a man



into the dining-room with considerable importance; a tall, heavy-shouldered gray man, with broad red suspenders over his gray woolen shirt, a colored cotton handkerchief awry about his neck. He was dusty and saddle-soiled, but full of loud words and boisterous animation, his big voice ringing in the dining-room, audible to its remote corners. He was belted with a pistol; a shaggy gray mustache drooped over his mouth.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Laylander, going forward to meet the man under Mrs. Cowgill's solicitous convoy.

Louise could feel trouble in the air, trouble in the way the young Texan stepped out to meet this man. The new guest stopped when he saw Laylander, squaring off as if to stand on the defense.

"Colonel Withers, is it true you've sent the sheriff out and attached my cattle?" Laylander demanded.

"You seem to be posted about right," Withers replied.

They stood set, each waiting for the other to make a move, each knowing the man before him well enough to understand what a false start would bring.

"I don't owe you, or any other man in

Kansas, a cent, Colonel Withers. What kind of a trumped-up trick is this you're tryin' to throw over on me?"

"I don't trump up tricks, bud. You'll learn to pick your words better if you hang around where I'm at for a while. Maybe you don't owe me anything, personally, but your old daddy owed me ten thousand dollars long enough to make it an heirloom. I've been waitin' four years for him to send a herd into this state, but I never could git a twist on the old wolf's tail, so I trapped the cub."

"I never heard of any debt owin' to you," the young man said. He spoke more in challenge than denial, the ruddiness fading out of his face.

"Likely not, kid, but the longer you live the more you're due to pick up. I've got old Tom Laylander's note for ten thousand dollars, and it's a good and legal paper. I'm out to collect on it."

"You tolled me on to ship up here so you could levy on my herd!" Tom charged indignantly.

"You guessed it," Withers replied, exulting in the success of his deception.

"Debt or no debt, Colonel Withers, it was a low-handed, sneakin' trick! It was a trick that no man outside of a thief and a liar——"

Withers spun half around, hand on his gun, presenting himself side-on, like a fencer.

"Any man that spits them words in my face has got to eat 'em!" he said.

"You know the way to the door," Tom Laylander replied.

Calhoun Withers, called Colonel from his auctioneering days, turned and marched toward the door, followed by young Laylander, whose courage was as high as his honor. Mrs. Cowgill was thrown into a frenzy of consternation by this sudden shaping of tragedy among her peaceful tables. She lifted her arms in impotent signal of distress, running to the long table where the few railroaders lingered over their late supper.

"Stop 'em, stop 'em, some of you men!" she appealed. "Cal Withers is goin' to kill him, and his supper ain't paid for!"

no concern whatever in what might happen to either of the combatants beyond the entertainment their engagement might afford, the little desk bell began to clamor an insistent and imperative call.

Mrs. Cowgill ran from the room, followed by the railroaders, who came crowding and jesting. Goosie was in the midst of them as gay as if going to a fair. Louise stood a few moments beside the table, hands on the dish-laden tray as if to lift it and go about her duty, let tragedy run out of the door as it might.

She felt a cold numbness settle over her, a shocking realization of the sacrifice that youth was marching out so passionately white and erect to make to honor. She had no doubt that Laylander had been cheated out of his property, or was in the way of being cheated, by a groundless claim, but she could not see how he was to help matters any by killing or being killed in the dusty road before the hotel door. She ran after the others, hoping to see somebody come between the angry men and send them away without a fight.

Laylander was before the desk, waiting for Mrs. Cowgill, who was just edging around behind it as Louise reached the office. The railroaders were bunched where they had stopped just inside the office door, not rash enough to allow curiosity to draw them into danger. Angus Valorous, in his white shirt without a collar, the neckband open on his whiskered throat, was pushing after Mrs. Cowgill as if to lend his assistance in the crisis which seemed to confront the establishment. Withers had gone out to the sidewalk. Louise saw him stand there a moment, then turn to the right and saunter nonchalantly past the window out of sight.

"I wish to pay for myself and the other gentleman that ate with me," Laylander said, his voice calm and steady.

"It'll be a dollar," Mrs. Cowgill told him, a flutter in her tone, a greater flutter in her heart, which, as she said when recalling the experience, felt like it would wear itself out against her ribs.

Laylander put the money down. At the sight of it all of Mrs. Cowgill's concern for herself was dissipated, the humane and gentle part of her nature, pretty well hardened and driven back out of sight by frontier boarding-house life for twenty years and more, impelled her to grasp the young man's hand.

"Don't go out there, don't you go!" she begged. "Cal Withers has killed three or four men in his time—they say he's a

CHAPTER V.

FLAGGED

MRS. COWGILL'S fear was premature and unfounded. While she stood making her appeal for interference to the railroad men, who had

man that never takes chances, he'll not take any chances with you. He'll drop you the minute you step out of that door!"

"Thank you, ma'am," said Laylander, too proud in his anger and outraged feelings to be embarrassed by her restraining hand. "That was a very nice supper, ma'am. I'm much obliged."

He drew his hand away, gently, thoughtful of her, a kind stranger who wished him well, and started for the door.

"Don't go out there!" Mrs. Cowgill leaned over the counter and stretched her arms out in womanly appeal, the desperation of his situation growing on her as she pleaded. "Go to law and fight him, but don't try to do it with your gun!"



Laylander was at the door, his hand on the screen to push it open. He paused long enough to face around to her in grateful acknowledgment of her concern. He lifted his hand to her in a gallant little salute, and smiled.

"Can't some of you men stop him?" Mrs. Cowgill demanded of them savagely, turning to Windy Moore, the brakeman, the roundhouse foreman and three others who made up the little crowd. "It's murder—it's murder!"

Angus Valorous reached under the counter and drew out a club, a stick such as brakemen used in those days for coupling cars and setting brakes. He made a dash for the end of the counter with it in his capable fist. Mrs. Cowgill threw herself in front of him, denying him passage.

"Not you—I don't mean you. One boy's enough to be killed!"

She cornered him behind the counter, pushing along close to the window, where Angus stood glaring and white, holding his club in both hands, like a ball bat, leaning over as if calculating his chances of jumping the counter and making for the door. Mrs. Cowgill caught him by the suspenders and held him prisoner.

Laylander was in plain view through the screen door, standing where he had stepped to the sidewalk, hand close to his gun. He was looking down the street in the direction Withers had gone.

"Somebody make him come in here!" Mrs. Cowgill begged.

The railroaders did not respond. They spread out a little, moving toward the door for a better view, indifferent to anybody's

safety but their own. Louise went to the front of the office, where she stood leaning against the counter, feeling as weak and breathless as if her own life depended on some quick action of which she was not capable. She was only dimly conscious of other people in the room, the dread that chilled her was so numbing and intense. She saw Laylander walk slowly across the broad sidewalk under the hotel awning, hand hovering over his gun, fingers spread stiffly, awkwardly for such a tremendous emergency, it seemed. He stepped carefully, like a man wading a shallow, rapid, rocky stream, head turned to watch down the street.

Through the window at the end of the counter Louise saw Withers and three other men, all armed, starting across the street at a point about opposite the farther corner of the hotel. They were walking in the same cautious way, feet raised high at every step, heads twisted to watch the lone man who was wading out into that invisible stream of death, as it seemed to Louise, to face them and fall.

The railroaders craned their necks; nobody spoke. Angus Valorous, held by Mrs. Cowgill's determined hand, was beating the counter in quick, savage blows of his club, like a caged gorilla venting its impotent rage. Myron Cowgill came, pipe in his mouth, moved by a slow curiosity, to stand behind the railroaders. A thin stream of smoke issued from the bowl of his pipe, to be drawn slowly out through the screen door.

Laylander was about a quarter of the way across the broad, dust-smothered street, his left hand a little before him, his feet lifted slowly and put down carefully. He was watching Cal Withers and the three men along with him, as he went. Withers had come to the middle of the street, and stopped.

Louise Gardner moved a little nearer the door. She was taut as a wet rope, choked with the indignant, voiceless protest against one man's foolish courage and four men's shameless threat. The others who stood watching the oncoming tragedy were silent. Angus Valorous ceased his clatter to look, breath held for the first shot. Mrs. Cowgill stood clinging to his suspenders, her eyes big with the terror that paralyzed her ready tongue.

Laylander reached the middle of the street. There he squared around to face the little bunch of men twenty yards or less along the dusty way, backing from them a little, as if the distance did not

agree with his method, or to give himself more time to calculate his chance against this unexpected number. As if in derision of this maneuver, but in fact to provoke Laylander into firing the first shot, Withers jerked off his hat and flung it sailing into the space that lay between them.

Laylander fell into the trap that would give Withers an excuse in law for shooting him down. He slung out his gun and put a bullet through the hat before it struck the ground.

Louise saw Laylander skip and leap, as a boy prances to dodge rocks and confuse the aim of his assailants, when the others began to shoot; she saw the little spurts of dust around his feet, and the jerking motion of his arm as he threw a quick shot in reply.

"Stop her, stop that girl!" Mrs. Cowgill screamed.

Angus Valorous beat a frenzied tattoo on the counter with his club as Louise dashed open the screen door and ran into the street between the fighting men, before Laylander could steady himself for a second, and more effective, shot.

"They'll murder her!" Mrs. Cowgill cried out, her voice broken by alarm.

She hurried to the door, Angus close after her, club in his hand.

Louise stood facing Withers, her arms stretched out in commanding gesture, as if she barred the way to both his bullets and himself.

"She's flagged him!" said Windy Moore.

The shooting stopped with the appearance of Louise in the road. Mrs. Cowgill and Angus rushed in to enforce her demand for peace; everybody thought it was a good time to go out and hear what was said. Windy Moore, the brakeman, led the way from the hotel; Banjo Gibson came at the head of those who started over from the saloon. There was such a crowd between the lines in a few seconds that any more shooting for that occasion was out of all safety bounds.

Withers put up his pistol; somebody handed him his hat. He jerked it ungraciously from the man who had picked it up, beat the dust out of it against his leg, put it on, and stood glaring at Angus Valorous as if the blame for the whole disturbance lay on his head. Nobody appeared to be hurt on either side, although Laylander was lost sight of for the moment in the crowding forward and the uptrampling of dust.

"If I ever saw a low-down houn' on two

legs," said Mrs. Cowgill, "I'm lookin' at one right now. Four of you to pile onto that innocent boy, no more shame in you, Cal Withers, than a dog!"

"When your opinion's needed, ma'am, it'll be called for," Withers said, the sting of her reproach bringing a surge of blood into his face.

"Put up that gun!" Angus Valorous commanded, lifting his club against one of



Withers's men who stood with his weapon drawn as if he wanted to go on with the fight. The fellow looked with a sort of startled surprise at the bristling young man with the unsullied new club. "Put it up, I said!" Angus repeated, in the deep harsh voice of a terrible man.

The cowboy seemed to be charmed by the peculiar weapon that menaced his head. He fixed his eyes on Angus with startled, staring attention as his hand moved slowly to restore the pistol to its place.

"If you ever pull a gun on me I'll bust you wide open!" Angus threatened.

The people who had crowded up to see and hear pressed around Withers and his men in that questioning silence peculiar to a crowd that has arrived when the thing is over. There is an expression in such silence of feeling cheated out of something, and a question of whether it is going to begin again. Laylander approached, pushing his way apologetically among those who stood near Mrs. Cowgill.

"It's a handy thing to have a lady friend around to do your fightin' for you!" Withers said.

"The lady is a stranger to me, but no man can speak a slight against her where I'm at," Laylander replied.

Mrs. Cowgill put herself between them as the others fell back to make room for the show they had hoped all along would open again.

"She's the same to me as my daughter," Mrs. Cowgill declared. "You keep a still tongue in your mouth when you speak of that girl, Cal Withers!"

"Ma'am, I don't need any he-woman to tell me my business." Withers scored her with a look as he spoke. "You got

through this time, bud," turning to Laylander, "but you're not apt to be so lucky the next time I catch you away from the women folks. I just want to say this to you, kid: you're standin' where the roads branch; one of 'em runs off to nowhere, the other one to Texas. I'll leave it to you to pick the one you take."

"I'll be found right around here till I get my property back, Colonel Withers."

"He's no more colonel than my old black Rachel!" Mrs. Cowgill declared.

"You'll stay some time," Withers said, passing over Mrs. Cowgill's challenge to his honorable auctioneering title.

"I'll law you ten years, but I'll get them cattle of mine," Laylander said.

"You'll never live ten seconds if I meet you in the road!"

"There never will be a better time than right now, Colonel Withers."

"That's right!" said Windy Moore. "You might as well have it out right here."

"Four to one, the way Cal Withers always fights, I've heard it said, and I'll bet money he could clean you up, too," Mrs. Cowgill said. "I'm not goin' to have any fightin' and scrappin' in front of my hotel, now or any other time, if I can put a stop to it."

The city marshal appeared at that moment. He had a word or two with Cal Withers, who started off in the direction of the saloon, his men shouldering up around him, their heads together in close talk.

"They look as mean as misery," Banjo Gibson said.

Laylander looked around for the girl who had imperiled her life to save his own. She was not there. Windy Moore, who had an eye for every direction, saw what was passing in the young man's mind.

"I saw her skim across to the hotel," he said.

The crowd scattered, the sun went down, red as a clinker from a fire-box, with clouds banked darkly in the northwest threatening rain. Mrs. Cowgill looked strangely at Angus Valorous as he returned to the hotel beside her, his good sound club in hand. It was as if she had seen the man rise up in him, and was puzzled to account for it by any reasoning at her command.

Tom Laylander, under tow of Banjo Gibson, returned to the hotel and sat on a bench beside the door. From that haven

they saw Withers and his men get on their horses presently and ride away, lifting, for a time at least, the constraint of watching from Laylander's troubled mind.

"She run right up to the room," Goosie whispered as she stood with her mother looking into the deserted dining-room.

"Well," said Mrs. Cowgill in meaningless, empty way. "I'll send Angus to clear away the dishes."

"Didn't she make a sight of herself!" Goosie said, shocked beyond all bounds.

"I spoke my mind to Cal Withers," her mother returned, with wide irrelevance. "It'll cost me money, but I can live without his business. And I spoke my mind."

When she sent Angus Valorous to help Goosie with the dishes, Mrs. Cowgill gave him that queer, baffled, questioning look again. She went outside to take the cool of the evening on the bench along with Banjo Gibson and the young man from Texas, whose fresh, honest, homely face made her think of a pink cosmos flower, it was so plain, and yet so good to see. She did her best to assure him that he was among friends at the Cottonwood Hotel, no matter what might wait for him out in the road.

Business was slack at that hour; cowhands did not begin to come in until much later in the night, after they had made the round of the town. Angus Valorous—commonly called by her Angus V'lors, after his own pronunciation of the sonorous word—would take care of them, as always. She puzzled again over that unexpected showing of the man in him, thinking in her own strange way that he must have grown up in the night without her noticing it.

She looked in at the window to see if Angus Valorous had returned to his duty behind the desk: Angus was there. He had taken three cigar boxes from the showcase, put the ink-

bottle on one of them, making an engine of it. He was pushing this little train forward and back the length of the short counter, between showcase and wall, fat little mouth puckered, black-whiskered cheeks rising and falling in the rapid exhaust of his chuffing engine, the world and its business, its comedies and tragedies, shut out of his thoughts as by an iron door.



CHAPTER VI

ONE THING AND ANOTHER

THE parlor of the Cottonwood Hotel was in the front of the house, opposite the office. It was a room that was a sort of left-over, suitable for nothing else but a parlor, small and pinched, with two lean windows looking out on a cottonwood tree, the sidewalk and the end of the watering trough. Drummers sometimes used it for a sample room, making it gay with red underwear, silk petticoats, and neckties of assertive hues.

There was an organ in a corner of the room, with work on the top of it similar to the headboard of an old-time walnut bed. It was a very grand organ, having many stops and starts, all of which were known to Goosie like the toes on her feet. When Goosie played it and sang sentimental songs, her tears fell down upon the keys.

Mrs. Cowgill liked to sit in the parlor on rainy days, such as this, and watch the cowhands come and go on their drenched horses, mud to the fetlocks in the street that was dust but yesterday, water slithering from their slickers, not much gaiety in them, and no regard for anybody who wanted to cross on foot. Banjo Gibson was sitting at the other window, facing Mrs. Cowgill in amiable propinquity. Banjo was living at the Cottonwood Hotel on his means; he would continue on that arrangement until his wad of sixty dollars was gone, which would be a good while at five dollars a week for room and board, the current rate for regulars at that house. Which was a high rate for that town and that day, sufficient to keep the vulgar in their proper place.

It was that slack hour in the afternoon between dinner and supper—there was no such meal as luncheon in the heavy economy of the Cottonwood Hotel—when cook and dining-room girls, as well as Mrs. Cowgill, had a little while to catch their breath. Mrs. Cowgill encouraged the girls to make use of the parlor during this lull, their presence there giving the house an air of liveliness and continual business. Goosie frequently pumped the organ in the afternoon, and sang her sentimental songs, although she could not merge herself so completely and comfortably with the lost ladies of the ballads when there was anybody around as she could when alone, and in a darkened place.

Mrs. Cowgill had a son, a knock-kneed, shambling, long-armed stuttering chap of

twenty-four or five, who had a regular run firing a through freight. She called him Herby, but everybody else called him Pap. He was laying over today, and he also was in the parlor, spread out on the sofa in the elegant repose of a man who could afford it. He had blue sleeve-holders with tassels. Pap had a naturally leering and goggling look about him which seemed to mock and discredit everybody, and everything they said. He talked slowly and thickly, his words catching frequently, like a knot at the end of a rope.

So these three lights of civilization were in the parlor of the Cottonwood Hotel, engaged in a three-cornered talk, the subject of which was Tom Laylander, and his adventures in McPacken.

"I sent him to Judge Dockum," Mrs. Cowgill said. "I knew if his case was to be won Judge Dockum could win it."

"It'll be five or six weeks before court meets," said Banjo, "and them cattle they're out there with nine or ten deputy sheriffs herdin' and watchin' over them. It don't matter much, it looks to me, who wins, with all them costs to pay. Won't be nothing left."

"Poor feller, he paid them two men that helped him bring the cattle up from Texas, and he had to put down a hundred dollars before Judge Dockum he'd touch the case. It left him strapped."

"I hu-hu-hope you ain't carryin' him on," said Pap.

"He paid a week in advance, but his time's up today. Well, I wouldn't shut down on him, even if he didn't have a job."

"Got a job, has he?" Banjo inquired, a laugh in his words as if he saw humor in the necessity that drove a man to that pass.

"Funny the way that boy hunted high and low over this town for work and couldn't find it anywhere," Mrs. Cowgill soliloquized. "Yes; oh yes. He got a job this morning, starts in tomorrow, he told me."

"Cow job?" Banjo inquired.

"No; too bad it ain't. But he didn't want to leave town, he said. I think the poor boy wants to be here in hopes he'll meet that old rascal Withers and shoot it out between them."

"From what I hear of Withers he ain't so long on the fight as you might take him to be," Banjo said.

"He'll fight, all right," Mrs. Cowgill corrected him seriously and glumly enough. "The trouble with him is he wants to have a sure thing. That boy never will meet him alone; Cal's always goin' to be care-

ful to have two or three limber-jims with him when he comes to town. I saw him in yesterday morning with that same gang he had the other day, but Tom was out hustlin' around for a job and didn't even know he was in town."

"Maybe he wasn't lookin' for him very hu-hu-hard," said Pap.

"Don't fool yourself!" Banjo advised seriously. "That boy he'd wade through a river of wildcats for a crack at that old crook."

"He won't make the mistake of shootin' first next time, though," Mrs. Cowgill said confidently. "I posted him on that. Well, when he goes to work maybe he'll be kep' out of the way. Cal don't come to town except to do his business with the bank and buy his supplies. He's only around here in business hours. I hope to mercy we can put off that shootin' match till Tom beats the case in court."

"What kind of a job's he got?" Pap asked.

"It was funny the way he went around town huntin' work," Mrs. Cowgill said, ignoring the importunities of Banjo and her son, bound to begin at the beginning and move all the trifles out of her way clear down to the end. "He was wearin' that old white Stetson—well, it was white once—with the crown pushed up as high as it would go, his gun hangin' on him like he was out to kill. He went to the round-house first, and struck Ford Langley to take him on. Ford said he looked like a toothpick under a toadstool with that big hat on, his face kind of peaked the way it's got since this trouble struck him. Ford sent him on to the shops, and the boys there got onto the joke and passed him along from one fool thing to another. They kep' him trottin' two or three days before he caught on they were kiddin' him."

Banjo Gibson laughed; a care-free, head-back, mouth-open laugh that rang with an appreciation of life. Pap seemed indifferent to the further adventures of the Texas cowman, ignoble creature at the best.

"He tried the livery stable and the stores, and I believe he even tried the bank," Mrs. Cowgill continued.

"Where'd he pick up a job?" Banjo asked, trying politely to bring

the evasive narration to an end.

"Jerryin', Orrin Smith took him on the section."

"The hu-hu-hell you say!" said Pap.

Banjo said nothing. He looked sort of foolish, his face coloring a little, as if he had heard something obscene.

"He asked me for board when he come in at noon, and I told him I'd let him stay."

"The hu-hu-hell you did!" said Pap.

"I've been kind of thick with that feller, I kind of took up with him," Banjo confessed, regret, humiliation, in his tone.

"Well, he didn't know any better than to go to jerryin'. He's as green as grass," Mrs. Cowgill excused him.

"Jerryin'!" Banjo derided. "I'd ruther git me a tin bill and shovel mud with the ducks."

"It was funny," Mrs. Cowgill reflected, the humor of the case bright in her eyes, "when he come back today he said he was goin' railroadin'."

"The hu-hu-hell he did! Damn jerry!" Pap was so moved by the fellow's presumption that he sat up, his greasy countenance inflamed, his pop eyes leering.

"What're they payin' the jerries now?" Banjo asked indifferently.

"Two-and-a-half on this division; east of here only two," Mrs. Cowgill replied.

"You'll be losin' a lot of railroad men if you make this hu-hu-house a dump for jerries," Pap warned her.

"There'll only be him and Orrin. Nobody's got any kick comin' on Orrin, his boss, even if it ain't such a very high-up job. I'll put him and Tom off together at a corner table, and Louise can wait on 'em. Nobody'll notice. Well, I don't care if they do. He's a good, decent boy; he didn't know what he was doin' when he took a section-hand job."

"Let him go over to Ryan's with the rest of the jerries," Pap suggested indignantly.

"He'll stay right here in this house till he gets good and ready to leave," said Mrs. Cowgill.

She closed her mouth very tightly on the declaration, her thin lips fitting like some excellent piece of joinery. Pap knew what it meant when she spoke and looked that way. A switch engine couldn't move her.

Pap went to the office and helped himself to one of the best cigars in the case, which was no great drain on the finances of the establishment. He sat on the porch, smoking. Mrs. Cowgill could see him, sitting there gloomy and disgruntled, as much out of sorts over her harboring a common jerry in that house as if he had been called on to share his bed with a stranger.



Louise came to the parlor door, looked in, and started away.

"Was you lookin' for something, 'Louise?" Mrs. Cowgill called.

"The rest of the Kansas City paper." Louise displayed part of it, with a nod and friendly smile to Banjo, who waved his hand airily.

"I ain't seen it," Mrs. Cowgill returned indifferently, "but I expect Myron's got it off in a corner somewhere. That man he'll read anything; he'll let business go any day to set down with a book or a paper and read."

Mrs. Cowgill was censorious and severe. She had no pride in her husband's facility with an accomplishment that was only a business adjunct to her, and loosely grasped at the best.

"Oh well, let him read it then," said Louise, unwilling to snatch one of Myron's few pleasures out of his hand. She entered the parlor, and sat on the end of the sofa.

"If he'd do more of his readin' on his carpenter's square, as I tell him, maybe I wouldn't have to slave my head off runnin' a hotel," Mrs. Cowgill said bitterly, at war on every point with all manner of printed matter that was not pressed into steel. "Now, there goes Herby over to the saloon! Banjo, I wish you'd go after him and tell him to let that slop alone. Tell him I said he'd better remember he's got to go out on his run tonight, and to let that slop alone!"

Banjo was not reluctant to go. He felt that he could carry a shot or two very cheerfully that gloomy day himself.

"I guess he's just goin' over to play a game of seven-up," said he rising, making preparations to follow. "Well, Louise, how're you stackin' up?"

"I'm as gay as possible, Mr. Banjo."

"Mr. Banjo!" Mrs. Cowgill repeated in comical astonishment, as she might have exclaimed over finding a ribbon on the handle of her frying pan. Then she laughed shrilly, in sudden outbreak, according to her habit, very little change in her facial expression indicative of mirth except her wide-stretched mouth.

"I thought you might be in love," said Banjo, facetiously. "You kind o' look like you'd been losin' sleep. If you need any advice, come to me."

"Thank you, Mr. Banjo." Louise made him a little bow, a merry light in her agate-clear brown eyes.

"I never heard you was a love doctor, Banjo," Mrs. Cowgill said. Her fit of

merriment had brought a flush to her cheeks, as brandy starts its fires under the eyes of one not accustomed to its use. Perhaps laughter intoxicated Mrs. Cowgill in like manner, so unaccustomed to her lips.

Banjo laughed in his own loud way, the machinery being well oiled and easy to swing in his case. It was a pleasant sound, tuneful contagious. One scarcely could help laughing with Banjo Gibson, let the matter that moved it be as trivial as a gnat. He waved his hand, jaunty and care-free as a troubadour should be. At next sight of him he was picking his way across the muddy street.

"Well, he ought to be posted in love matters, if he ain't," Mrs. Cowgill reflected, watching him with a sort of aloof and impersonal interest, as she might have watched a rooster engaged on a similar expedition. "He's been married to three women; he ought to know something about love."

"Young as he is?" Louise marveled, taking the chair lately vacated by the notable under discussion. "What became of them all?"

"Two of them run off with other men and one divorced him," Mrs. Cowgill replied, Banjo Gibson's simple history succinct and ready on her tongue.

"He's had a lot of experience for a little man," said Louise, looking after him with new interest. "But his losses don't seem to trouble him very much."

"No, nor make him any wiser. He's as light in the head as smoke. Well, if there ain't Maud Kelly!"

Louise leaned to see. A tall young woman, wearing a man's sombrero, a rubber cape around her shoulders, was crossing the street a little below the point where Banjo Gibson had forded it. She was stopping now and then to sling the viscous mud from her feet with a vigorous forward kick, which did not add to the decorum of her march.

It was plain that public opinion had very little weight with Maud Kelly. She was careless of the curious eyes fixed on her up and down the street. She crossed over to the hotel, where she stamped the rough of the mud off and continued on her way.

"Who is she?" asked Louise.

"Her father's one of our retired men. lives here in town. He used to be a catleman, and a big one in his day, but he



lost most of his money in mines. Maud's got a job in the court house, deputy county treasurer. Fine one to be trustin' with all that money!"

"She seems to be rather strong-minded," Louise ventured. She was looking at Maud Kelly's back as she went swinging up the street.

"I don't think she's got much of any kind of a mind. She's just daredevilish and don't care. Anyhow, we'll soon be rid of her in the treasurer's office. She's goin' to resign her job in a month or so to be married. She's marryin' a man named Cook, baggage-smasher here on the road. He's a big fine-lookin' man with a brown mustache. He's got a good job, too, better than brakeman, he makes good money, but I don't think it's the kind of a job the man that marries that girl ought to have—home one day and away two. The man that marries Maud Kelly wants to be at home every day."

"I wish I was a citizen of this town; I'd go and apply for her job."

"Yes, it'd be more suitable to you than dining-room work. If Goosie had the education you've got I wouldn't keep her around this place a minute. Why don't you try for the job, anyhow? Mr. Montgomery, the treasurer, he stops in every morning on his way to the office for a cigar—he says I keep the best in town. I'll speak to him about it in the morning. I wouldn't doubt he'd hire you in a minute."

"I never did that kind of work, I don't know a thing about it, but I believe I could handle the job, all right."

"Of course you could. Nothing to do but make out tax receipts and take in money. I could nearly do that myself—I could if I could write and spell a little better."

"There are mighty few things you couldn't do," said Louise, with more sincerity than flattery. She had seen enough of Julia Cowgill to know that she was a highly competent woman, indeed.

"I'll speak to him about it in the morning for you. It's a good place to get married from, better than a dining-room, respectable and nice, that is if a girl wants to make it that way. Of course Goosie she's doin' well with Bill Connor. He'll get his engine next year and they can live in style down in Argentine. But every girl in dining-room work can't do that well. Goosie ain't a hired girl. It's like marryin' a member of the firm."

"Yes, there's a big difference," said Louise.

She had felt this difference from the first in the attitude of the regular boarders who were familiar with her standing there. They attempted familiarities with her which they would not dare with the landlady's daughter, subjected her to coarse jokes and boisterous humor from which Goosie was supremely exempt.

Ford Langley, roundhouse foreman, was one of the leading humorists of the dining-room. He was as persistent as one of those gnats which dance and dart before the face when one walks at evening along a woodland path.

Langley was playing up to Goosie, plainly in the hope of supplanting Bill Connor, employing all the small flatteries of a sycophant. The most favored trick Langley had among his crude devices was showing Goosie in light superior to the green girl.

Langley would wink and smirk, and pass remarks about educated biscuit-shooters. He had many witty things to say about the thousand ways to make money that such a superior person knew, of which biscuit-shooting was the surest and best. Langley was an under-sized, dark-visaged man, with a nose sharp enough to work embroidery, as Mrs. Cowgill said. He had been reduced from engineer, and hoped to mount to that exalted station again in his day. Louise took Langley's banter with outward indifference, only now and then giving him a cut with some clever retort that turned the laugh to her side. These little flashes of repartee, her ready efforts to please everybody with her service, no matter how gay or how glum, raised up certain champions for her, who were not silent in her defense. Louise would much rather have had them keep their peace.

Goosie was friendly, but cynical and impatient, after the way of people who know much about some common thing, and hold all the rest of the world ignorant and in contempt. Try as she might, Louise could not march up to the swinging door between kitchen and dining-room with a loaded tray on her palm, held at shoulder level, back up to it and give it a kick with anything approaching the art of Goosie.

Louise had to take the door slowly, pushing it with her free shoulder and edging through; Goosie marched out while it was on the swing from her competent



and practiced foot. Louise was afraid to risk more than half as high a stack of empties on the tray as Goosie bore in triumph to the kitchen sink, where Angus Valorous washed them in the midst of a clatter from which he drew no knowing what simulation of jangling freight trains and puffing engines.

There was no romance, and mighty little dignity, in the labor of carrying on food at the Cottonwood Hotel; perhaps there is not much romance nor dignity in such a job anywhere. Louise did not doubt that Goosie's complaint of the unequal distribution of work, due to her assistant's want of bone and muscle, and inability to master the art of kicking open a swinging door, had led to Mrs. Cowgill's suggestion about the court house job. There was hope in the outlook, Louise knew, for Mrs. Cowgill was a woman with a pull. If her pull with the county treasurer was only half as strong as it was with the division superintendent of the railroad, Louise believed Mrs. Cowgill could land her in Maud Kelly's place without putting her influence to much of a strain.

CHAPTER VII

A LOWLY MAN

ONE day of sun turned the mud of Santa Fe Street into dust again, not so deep and comfortable under a horse's hoof as before, yet plentiful enough to give the two cottonwood trees in front of the hotel a gray and familiar look. Banjo Gibson was sitting on the green bench outside the door when the whistle at the shops announced the close of the railroad day, and the men began to arrive for supper. As they passed him, Banjo had a hearty word for everyone, and they were no less cordial, although somewhat patronizing and indulgent, as toward an inferior who had the special license of a peculiar gift or genius which lifted him almost up to their plane.

Bill Connor came in from his run, the first time Banjo had seen him since his return. Banjo had left him a wiper in the roundhouse when he went away from McPacken two years before to follow the fortunes of the medicine man. Now Bill had grown in bulk and consequence, but Banjo knew him the moment his foot struck the sidewalk under the awning.

It was a delightful reunion, at least for Banjo. He exclaimed in the wondering pleasure that an accomplished flatterer can make so pleasing to the object of it, as he

looked Bill over from his little black cap with green visor to the soles of his oily big shoes. They were talking that way, Banjo all laughter, Bill grinning tolerantly, his broad face sooted and black, when Tom Laylander came in from his first day's work as a section hand, or jerry, as the men who made the road safe for the wheels were called in derision.

"Hello, Mr. Gibson," Tom hailed, warmly and ingenuously, pausing a moment, a smile lighting up his face.

Banjo cut short his animated talk, turning slowly, as if an unwelcome, impertinent hand had been laid on his shoulder. He looked blankly, coldly, into Tom Laylander's face, seeming to say, "Now, who is this rascally vagabond?" Only he did not say anything. Just stood that way, haughtily, coldly; displeasure, contempt, in his sneering little face. He turned to Bill Connor again, having cut the impudent jerry to the bone.

Tom Laylander's face burned with the insult; his heart seemed to drop so low in his mortification that it hit the ground. He went on, lame of foot from his high-heeled boots, which were made for the saddle, and not the ballast bed of a railroad. His hands were blistered by the tamping-bar that he had swung with the killing vigor of a greenhorn for the longest ten hours he ever had lived.

Laylander's pistol was buckled around him, as he had worn it all day, much to the entertainment of the jerries, the leather of his belt sweat-soaked and sagging, his body galled from the drag of it. He wondered what he had done to forfeit the friendship of Banjo Gibson, quite innocent yet of the barrier that he had raised between himself and other railroad men when he went to work for Orrin Smith on the section.

The jerry, to the better paid, more pleasantly employed railroad men, was a sort of clown, a comical low fellow to be laughed at and treated with jest, and regarded with complacent self-felicitating on one's natural and social superiority over him. These more fortunate servants of the same master drew a rigid social line. This was as pronounced between conductor, engineer, brakeman, fireman, shop mechanic and the like on one hand; the jerry on the other, as between white men and black.

Mrs. Cowgill was fully cognizant of this social division. She knew she was going squarely in the face of public prejudice when she took Tom Laylander to board as a section hand. It did not need Pap's ob-

jections, nor Banjo Gibson's scorn, to tell her this. But she liked the boy. She did not have the heart to hurt him by pointing out an inferiority that was not his, that he did not and could not feel.

But she would draw the line with Tom. No other jerry could sit at her table or sleep in her beds. Railroad men washed up and put on clean collars and clean clothes before coming to supper. They went out in the morning to the shops looking like gentlemen, their greasy garments in neat rolls under their arms. She knew how the jerries at Ryan's came and went in the same clothes day after day, sneaking a bar of soap from Mrs. Ryan on Sunday to wash their shirts and overalls in the river. Nobody could blame a railroad man for refusing to sit with such a crowd at the table. Goosie would not wait on men like that.

It was a big concession, therefore, to lodge Tom Laylander after he had fallen to the low estate of section hand. It was not mercenary; she had plenty of boarders without him. It was nothing in the world but that assertion of tenderness and humanity that dies so hard in people's breasts, living in most of us long after we believe we have smothered it in the interest of our business and social success.

Tom came to supper as fresh as a pink, tidy in a clean shirt and necktie, his cougar-skin vest hiding his suspenders from the ladies' eyes. Mrs. Cowgill believed he even had gone to the trouble to shave. Orrin Smith, the section boss, had finished his supper and gone; Goosie had put a pair of cowhands at his table. She was sitting at the foot of the long common table, taking her supper with Bill Connor. Everybody else had cleaned up his pie and gone.

Mrs. Cowgill led Tom to a little table in a secluded corner, even farther away from the center of activities than she had intended. It was a pleasant situation beside a window. The evening wind was blowing the draggled lace curtains, bringing in with it a scent of curing prairie hay.

"After you wait on Tom, take your own supper," Mrs. Cowgill directed Louise. "Goosie she's about through; she'll catch anybody that happens in."

Tom hung his gun on the back of his chair, and stood a moment hesitantly deferential, as if he could not bring himself to sit down first in the presence of a lady. His face was red from the heat and sweat of the day, which something that he had put on it out of a little bottle with a rib-

bon around its neck had stimulated. This was a lotion thought to be very balmy and refreshing to the freshly shaved railroad face. It was in strong demand at Earl Gray's drug store.

"You're late, Mr. Laylander. There isn't much left," Louise said.

"Anything the cook can throw on a dish will do," Tom replied, growing redder, as if the lotion struck deeper every moment.

"Liver or steak?" Louise inquired, trying to look and feel detached and indifferent, as became her profession, but fighting a great deal harder to keep from smiling in the ingenuous young man's face. "I could get you some French fried, if you like them."

"I love 'em!" Tom declared, with such ardent simplicity that the smile could be restrained no longer.

Louise looked up; Tom still standing beside the chair, tall and bashful and red,



looked down. Each smiled into the other's eyes, and both felt more comfortable, the constraint removed, the way to something friendly, even steak and liver, made clear.

"I recommend the steak," said Louise.

"It'll hit me fine, ma'am," said Tom, hand on the back of the chair as respectfully as if he waited for the roadmaster, or the section boss, or the governor, or somebody equally high and important to depart. "But I'm not in any kind of a hurry," Tom protested. "You go ahead and get your own supper first."

"Certainly not," Louise returned, so decisively it made the young man start as if Cal Withers had taken a shot at him through the window. "But I'll take it along with you—if you don't mind," Louise proposed, smiling away the confusion her apparently snappish refusal had brought upon him.

"I'll be honored and delighted," said Tom. "I've been wantin' to have a little talk with you ever since you stepped out there in the road—"

"Wait till I bring on the supper," she suggested.

Tom found himself up against a ledge.

when it came to going into the subject of his obligation to Louise for stepping between him and Cal Withers when the odds stood so heavily against him that day. It was past, and it deserved nothing but to be forgotten, she said.

"That's easy to say, Miss Gardner, ma'am, but not so easy done. I owe you nothing short of my life. They'd 'a' got me that time; I didn't know he was goin' to bring out a bunch of them."

"They say it's his way. But forget about it, Mr. Laylander." She put her hand on his with a quick hovering touch, like the lighting of a bird, looking her appeal for no more thanks into his eyes.

"I'll have to let it pass, then, with this said, till you're better paid," he yielded. "Please just call me Tom. I'm nothing at all but a common jerry now."

"And I'm nothing but a common biscuit-shooter; call me Louise. But why do you say you're nothing but a jerry? A jerry is the same as any other railroader to me."

"Not to everybody," said Tom, shaking his head sadly. "It didn't strike me that it was such a poor and low-down job till that little Banjo Gibson man refused to speak to me this evenin'. He acted like I'd given him a mortal insult."

"Oh, that little loafer!"

"He was standin' talkin' to that man over at the table with Miss Goosie. He was plumb mortified and ashamed."

"How do you know it was because you're a jerry?"

"I asked that Angus boy. He was insulted, too. He said a jerry didn't have any business hornin' in amongst railroad men."

"It appears that we're both social outcasts, then, Tom. They kid me because I fell from book-agent to biscuit-shooter, and it seems like a comical sort of one, at that. They guy me till I feel like breaking dishes on them sometimes, especially Ford Langley. He seems to have a diabolical sort of pleasure in turning the laugh against me."

Louise laughed, but it was only a pretense, as Tom Laylander must have been very stupid, indeed, if he had not seen.

"I'll speak to the scoundrel," he said, the fire of indignation in his eyes.

"Please don't—he isn't worth it. Let them laugh, there's nothing else in life for them, they can't think. Who knows but you and I may have our own private little laugh one of these days? Maybe we'll not always be biscuit-shooters and jeries."

"Yes, you'll rise up and pass on," Tom said in his quaint, soft way of speaking, "I can see it in the cards you will. But for me I can't see anything more than a trampled trail, crisscrossed till it makes my eyes ache to try to read it."

Louise looked across the little table into his face, startled, alert, a question, or rather an appeal, in her concentrated attention. Another man had appeared for a moment from behind the ingenuous simplicity of this Texas cowboy. He had spoken and stepped back again, leaving the curtain that masked him scarcely agitated to show that he had passed. Tom was looking out of the window, his thin whitish eyebrows drawn, making little wrinkles run across his narrow, combative forehead from the bridge of his nose.

"Trampled trails," she repeated thoughtfully. "But they're broader when they're trampled, Tom, and easier to follow along."

"I mean when a lot of people have got the start over you and gone ahead," he explained. "They trample out the tracks of the thing you're tryin' to overtake and throw your rope on, mixin' it up so you can't tell whether you're on the right road or a blind one that spreads out to open range and nowhere in the end. That's what bothers a man, ma'am—Miss Louise."

"What have you been following, Tom, that you've lost in this crisscrossed road?"

Tom turned from the window, and met her inquiring, perplexed eyes with a look of leaping eagerness in his own.

"I started out to make a man of myself, Miss Louise. I wanted to get an education in my head and turned out something better than a cowman down among the postocks on the Brazos. Circumstances, Miss Louise, jerked the rope out of my hand. The animal I thought I was about to throw and brand loped off and left me gappin' after it like a fool. I don't guess I'll ever overtake it any more."

"How long were you in the university, Tom?"

"I left in the middle of my junior year, Miss Louise. But how did you know? The brand must be so dim on me by now it'd take a spyglass to see it."

"Not so dim," she said. "Do you plan to go back?"

"No, I'll turn my face elsewhere, Miss Louise. I'll go on tryin' to pick up something on the start I've got while I'm waitin' for the road to run a little plainer under my feet."

"But you could go back, Tom."

"Ma'am?" said Tom, the cowboy in complete possession again, staring into her animated face with bewildered eyes.

"When you sell your cattle, I mean."

"When I sell 'em, ma'am? I ain't even got 'em to sell."

"You will have them; you're bound to beat that old thief."

"My lawyer says we'll beat him. He says the note Withers holds over me was outlawed in this state five years ago, if it never was paid. But I tell you, Miss Louise, if my father ever owed that man ten thousand dollars that long ago, it was paid."

"He ought to have been careful to get his note back," she said.

"They were awful careless about such little things in those days, Miss Louise."

"Little things! It seems to me a lot of money to loan on nothing but an unsecured note, as Withers says this one was."

"No, not so very much. In the old days when cattlemen were makin' money that wasn't any more to my father than ten dollars would be to one of these self-admirin' railroad men. They just handed such little sums around among themselves without a line of writin' most of the time. That was only small change in the days range cattle paid."

"It was a careless way to handle small change, anyhow."

"Yes, it does seem so," Tom admitted gloomily. "Withers says my father borrowed it when he had a herd up here on



Kansas grass a long time ago. I never heard about it if he did. I've wrote to mother to search the old books. It'll be down there if father ever borrowed money from Withers and made his note, for he was a careful man about writin' down his records. I didn't tell mother I'd been attached; I just said Colonel Withers had put in a claim."

"That was better than the whole truth, I think. Have you seen Withers since that—since he put the attachment on your herd?"

"I haven't had the pleasure of meetin' him," said Tom, with peculiar stress.

"I saw him here in town swelling around with two guns on today. He had a gang with him, four or five limber-jims, as Mrs. Cowgill calls them. They trailed after him wherever he went, like a lot of dogs."

"I'm not astonished to hear of it," said Tom.

"Tom," her hand on his again in that impulsive, open and ingenuous way of arresting attention and holding it, "I can't ask you to keep out of his way, I'm not going to ask you to dodge him. But don't hunt him up, Tom, please don't hunt him up. If you see him here in town some evening spreading it around that way, just let him strut—don't rush out and begin to shoot."

"I'd like to do most anything to please you, Miss Louise," said Tom, his face very red, as if what she had asked of him made him ashamed.

"Withers will try to provoke you to make the first break, the way you did before. Don't you see his scheme? They say it's his old trick, to have the slim excuse of defending his life. It puts the law on his side, technically, as the lawyers say. What I mean is, let him start it next time. Let him come to you, don't you go to him."

"Circumstances, I expect, would have to control my actions, Miss Louise. I see the point of your argument, and I'll try to keep it in my mind. I'd rather not have any ruction with him till after the law disposes of my case."

"It would be much better, it would be so much more in your favor. And remember, if you do meet him, let him make the first break. You'd just as well have the law on your side as his."

"That's mighty good advice, and I'll do my best to follow after it, Miss Louise."

So they sat over their supper and talked, those two inferiors among the railroad aristocracy, jokes, both of them, to the hogheads and shacks and clinker-pullers, mainly because they were people who had been up and had come down.

Bill Connor, sitting beside Goosie, easy in that proprietary feeling of a man who knows his situation is secure, lit a cigar and flipped the match contemptuously toward the table where the jerry and the biscuit-shooter sat.

"Looks like she's took a kid to raise," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

FANNING BULLETS

ORRIN SMITH gave Tom a little fatherly advice that night on the proper costume and deportment of a jerry. As a consequence of it, Tom appeared next day clad in blue overalls and brogans. When the gang arrived at the place where the day's work was to be done, Tom left his gun on the handcar with the jerries' dinner pails. Smith said he had no objection to any of his men wearing guns coming and going to work, but he didn't want them encumbered by weapons out on the track. A man's enemies were not likely to seek him there, in the presence of so much company, said Smith.

Tom accepted the boss's view of the case cheerfully. There was not much of a Texas look about him that day, except his old dingy-white Stetson, which bobbed around among the jerries' miscellaneous headgear as prominently as a white duck in a flock of gray ones. Mike Quinn, Tom's working partner, wore a narrow-brimmed little dicer, with holes cut in the sides of it to let the air in to his brain, he said. He advised Tom gravely to lay aside that fine costly sombrero for festive occasions, and get himself one that would not represent such a big investment, or be so subject to damage from contact with black oil and the hard knocks of a trackman's life.

Tom was respectful toward Mike Quinn and his advice, as he was toward all suggestions, serious and jocose, offered by his fellow toilers. This readiness to listen, his polite bearing and soft speech, quickly made a way for Tom where a flippant smart fellow would have found it hard going. The gang adopted him, very much in the way that a household adopts a strange animal, and took a vast pride in the distinction of having the only cowboy jerry that ever was known.

The jerries were proud of Tom's refined and deferential manners; proud of the pistol that he wore to and from work and hung on the lever of the handcar; proud of his big sombrero, which he retained against all argument to get him out of it at first. After a week they would have felt hurt and affronted if Tom had appeared in any other hat.

Section gangs in those times were made up mainly of old-timers who had followed the steel from the Lackawanna to the Santa Fe, grizzled men with thick arms

and mighty chests, "good dhrinkin' men" as they described themselves with pride. Nearly all of them were Irish, who had come to America young and stepped from the ship to the ties. They were a craft to themselves, as distinctive as sailors, with a speech full of terms applying to their trade, mystifying and foreign to the ears of the uninitiated. A careless, spendthrift, hardy set of rovers, veterans of the army that pushed the rails across desert and mountains, not insensible of the romance of their past, or the sacrifice of their service to their kind.

Few of them ever rose to be bosses, or more than straw-bosses, at the best, owing to their illiteracy. They never learned any more about railroad building and maintenance than the routine of their daily toil, nor cared to learn. They were land sailors who had learned the ropes; it was not for them to be captains, and they knew it very well.

Once in a while there was one to be met like Mike Quinn. Mike was a reading man, although as good a drinking man as ever breasted the bar. He could discourse about the Pyramids and the Missouri River; about Napoleon and Brigham Young. He followed politics, and read the prize-fight news to the jerries under the cottonwood trees at Mrs. Ryan's boarding house beside the track. It took a crafty man at an argument to get ahead of Mike, who would come around with unexpected quips and turns.

Trainmen were greatly amused by the sight of Tom Laylander in his big hat, humping over a tamping-pick; infinitely diverted by his gun swinging on the handcar lever at the side of the track. They called him the "cow jerry"; the news of his presence on the section at McPacken went up and down the line.

Firemen stood in the cab doors to look at him as they passed, some of them making facetious gestures of drawing a gun or swinging a rope. Brakemen on the tops of freight trains varied these, to Tom, questionably comical antics, by whooping, and prancing around in imitation of a bronco.

All of these cracks at him on the part of the intellectuals, taken in addition to the general run of mockery and derision thrown at the jerries in passing, began to



nettle Tom after a while. All railroaders were alike to him, these on the trains only fellow-servants of the same master served by the section men. It seemed small business to Tom, this imitating the pumping of a handcar, driving brakemen and firemen. Conductors and engineers, to their everlasting credit and respect in Tom Laylander's memory, never stooped to these mocking frivolities.

Where it hit Tom was its intentional insult and malignancy, or perhaps insolent exultation over men placed by chance or misfortune, or choice, and proud enough in their selection, in this lowly way of earning their daily chuck. He resented this attitude strongly, often speaking his mind on it to Mike Quinn, who as regularly came forward with his philosophy to calm his indignation.

"Consider the source," said Mike, "as the man said whin the jackass kicked him, and let it pass."

It took all of Mike's philosophy, as well as such of his own as he could command, to hold Tom from pitching a rock at Windy Moore when he went by, prancing and making derisive pantomime, leaning over and shouting "Cow jerry! Ya-a-a! Ya-a-a!"

This happened every second day when Windy passed. Windy was not a very high man in the aristocracy of trainmen, being nothing more than brakeman on the local freight, which was the very beginning, in fact, of the long and bumpy road to the conductor's seat in the cupola of a caboose. Windy had a long way to go before arriving among the great, but he was ages in the evolution of labor above the lowly state of section hand.

"Let ye stand on your dignity, lad, and lave 'em pass," Mike advised. "If the poor crathurs get any pleasure out of their prancin' and dancin' and posthurin' around, let 'em have it. They're a lot of poor ignorant fellys that never read a book of histry in their lives. Savages, they are, lad. The nagur savages in the wilds of Africa makes faces at strangers, and prance and mock and posthure in insultin' capers, the same as these poor brakeys do, tryin' to provoke the first blow.

"These boxcar lads think they're the important men in railroadin'. They are not. Take away the section boss and his gang for tin days and lave the thrack go; where would these fine lads land? In the ditch, with the freight cars on top of them, and not one among the lot with sinse

enough in the head of 'im to dhrive a spike.

"It's the lads on the thrack that count in railroadin'; nobody else. Take you and me, spikin' these ties. What would happen if we spread the rails, or dhraved 'em, three or four inches out o' gauge aither way? Where would Windy Moore be when the ingin sthrook the spot? Sailin' through the wind like a mateor, rammin' the head iv 'im in the ditch. Let 'em go, I tell ye, lad; let 'em pass."

This argument, aside from Mike's prejudice in favor of his own calling, had considerable truth to enforce it, Tom realized, but it did not excuse the offense nor palliate the sting. He studied the worst offenders, Windy Moore among them, marking each man well. As the days passed they became familiar figures, both on the road and in the streets of McPacken. He waited for them to try some of their funny business with him when they stood man to man on the ground.

This never happened. While the cow jerry was an object of great entertainment and ribald mockery to brakemen and firemen going by at thirty or fifty miles an hour, he was no funnier than any other man when met on the streets in town. Trainmen passed him there without a word or wink, as oblivious to his presence on earth, it appeared, as one of the myriad leaves on Mrs. Cowgill's cottonwood trees. If there was no spoken insult in this passing him over as if he did not exist, there was no aggression. Tom was satisfied to have it that way in town; he would have been happy and comfortable if they would have given him the same peace out on the road.

Let them have their joke, said Tom, even at his expense, though what there was so diverting and comical in the aspect of a man who had ridden the range all his life coming down to railroading, he could not see. For it was a come-down on his part; it would have been just as much of a come-down, to Laylander, shoveling coal into an engine firebox, or trotting the tops of boxcars, as tamping ties on the section. Railroading was all railroading to him, one job as respectable as another, all of it far below the freedom and independence of the range.

It was a comfort to Tom that he was not to be a regular railroader, that he was using the job as a temporary bridge to cross the few weeks which lay between him and the recovery of his cattle. It might be well, he considered, if he could enter into the spirit of the thing with the trainmen,

and show them that he, also, looked on his present occupation as a joke.

This notion pleased him. He went grinning around at his work while he turned over certain schemes for expressing his appreciation of their humorous banter to the passing brakemen, Windy Moore in particular. The more he thought of it the better it pleased him. Mike Quinn asked him if he had found a purse.

Tom's opportunity to put his plan of responsive appreciation into practice came when he had been a little more than a month on the gang. The jerries were going home from their day's work of picking up joints, when overtaken by the local freight, which came pounding toward McPacken with a long train of empties gathered at way stations during the day. The local was late, the engineer in a great sweat to make in to McPacken, out of humor with the dispatcher for laying him out everywhere for the numerous stock extras which had kept the rails hot that day.

This thing of overtaking a handcar and forcing the jerries to look lively for a spot to drag it off; their excited flinging of shovels and bars to lighten it if they had time; their shouts and agile jumping about, always amused trainmen as no other bit of comedy in the day's work. There were always two or three old jerries in every gang who went to pieces in a pinch of that kind, invoking the protection of the saints, laying hold of coats, dinner pails, tools; flinging them without regard or direction, or the assistance or impediment of the urgent work in hand.

Orrin Smith's crew was no exception in this regard. There were three handcar-loads of terriers in his gang, proceeding that evening in close order toward the tool house, most of them smoking comfortably, pumping with leisurely stroke, standing so thick that few could get more than one hand on the levers.

Smith was riding on the first car, watching back for the local, which he knew had not passed and was hours late. It caught them on a straight piece of track, with plenty of time to get the cars off, but the nervous old-timers strewed the right of way with shovels, picks and dinner buckets, flinging them as if they jettisoned the cargo of a floundering ship.

This scene of excitement ahead of them, the bright pails flashing, covers flying off, coats sailing with arms outspread, gave a seasoning to the humor of the situation for the trainmen which even the crusty en-

gineer unfixed his face to enjoy. The fireman came to the right-hand side of the cab—the jerries were going off the rails on that side—where he stood grinning. As the engine flashed by he made the sign which commonly passed in such cases: smashing his right fist into his left palm, spreading his hands with an upward motion of dispersion, complete obliteration, illustrative of a burst rocket, nothing left but the smoke. "That's what's going to happen to this gang of jerries one of these days. Smart as you are, we'll get you yet." So this sign of collision and dismemberment meant.

Windy Moore was standing on top of a boxcar about midway of the long train, leaning against the wind, his loose overalls flagging around his skinny legs. As he approached the jerries, scattered around



their hastily removed handcars, picking up their coats, looking for pipes that had been lost in the wild throwing off, Windy came over to the edge of the car roof, where he leaned, derision wide in his mocking face.

Tom Laylander was standing by, smoking a cigarette. He was in a glow of quickened blood, the little flurry having been quite to his liking, a welcome break in the monotony of a long and grinding day. His pistol was in its scuffed holster against his leg, his big hat threw a slantwise shadow across his face. Jerrying wouldn't be a bad job at all if there was more of this kind of stuff in it, he thought. And there came Windy Moore across his moment of pleasure, leaning out to fling his taunt and jeer.

"Cow jerry! Ya-a-a!" yelled Windy Moore, singling Tom out for his malicious witticism, as always.

Windy passed in a roar and swirl of dust, his long-drawn *ya-a-a* streaming after him as seeds fly out of a milkweed pod when it is held to the wind. Tom pulled out his gun between puffs on his little cigarette and threw a shot over the top of Windy Moore's boxcar, plugging another one after it so fast it followed the same hole through the air.

The bullets must have whispered some-

thing new to Windy Moore, something that he could hear above the roar and jangle of the loose-jointed freight. He stooped and dodged, fanning the wind as if fighting a sudden attack of hornets, looking all the time for some place to go. There never was a little brakeman on that division with such urgent business behind him as Windy Moore had for the next few seconds, Tom Laylander standing back at the other end of the quick-stretching distance, emptying his gun over the boxcar that Windy rode.

The train was going fast, but not fast enough for Windy. He was near the end of the car, but it was the wrong end; the ladder was on the side of the shooting cow jerry. Windy even outran the train when he broke for the forward end of the boxcar, where he grabbed the top bracket of the ladder and swung himself to safety on the opposite side.

"Stop shootin' at that man!" Orrin Smith yelled, his face white in the fear for his job that rushed over him.

The caboose jerked by, leaving the jerries in sudden silence.

"What do you mean, shootin' at that man?" Smith demanded, his order to hit the grit and look for another job plain to his excited eyes.

"I wasn't shootin' at him," Tom corrected his boss, grinning in the pleasure of recalling Windy Moore fanning the bullets away from his ears. "I was only shootin to-wards him."

"Dang the difference, dang the difference!" said Smith, who was a notably temperate man.

"When you shoot at a man you hit him," Tom explained. "That's the difference, Mr. Smith."

Smith was a man with thick, sloping shoulders, like a bottle. His voice was in the front of his mouth; his words came out with a blab, like the bleat of a sheep.

"They'll report it, they'll report it the minute they hit town! Well, git them cars on—git them cars on!"

Smith looked mighty glum the rest of the way to the tool house, sitting on the water keg with his foot beside the brake. The jerries were silent, throwing a ham into the little old handcar with unusual vigor. They looked at Tom with slanting glances, rolling their eyes, keeping their faces straight ahead. They acted like a crowd of boys accessory to a disastrous prank by one of their number, anxious to prove by their present conduct that they were in no manner implicated nor to blame.

Smith brought the handcar to a stop before the tool house door. Foot on the brake he looked up with reproachful severity at Tom, who was swinging to the ground.

"You're fired," said Smith.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelin's, Mr. Smith," Tom said, rather jolted by this unexpected ending of what he had meant to be nothing more than a pleasant prank, "You and your dang gun, shootin' around here!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, feeling decidedly foolish.

"I'll give you your time this evenin'. I'm through with gun-toters on my section."

(Part II in the next issue of SHORT STORIES)



NEXT ISSUE

THE FREIGHT BOSS

By E. S. PLADWELL



THE HAND AT THE WINDOW

BY L. DEBRA

Author of "The Scar," "Fang Toi's Bargain," etc.

SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN YIELDS ANOTHER MYSTERY FOR THE POLICE TO SOLVE, AND SHOWS ONCE AGAIN HOW DIFFERENT ARE THE STANDARDS OF THE EAST.

IT WAS a hurry-up call from Detective Lyons, of the Chinatown squad, that took me to the San Francisco police station that rainy morning in March. Otherwise I wouldn't have stirred from my rooms. A "peace banquet," given by members of the Four Brothers tong, which I had attended as a guest of my old friend Chen Wan, had kept me up late the evening before. I hurried through my dressing and left my comfortable bachelor quarters only because Detective Lyons, very mysteriously, insisted that he must see me at once.

I found Lyons at his desk in the detective rooms. He was leaning back in his chair, his feet on the desk, a big cigar gripped in one corner of his strong jaws. I remember noting that he appeared perfectly calm; yet there was an odd texture to his florid skin that made him seem always red-faced and perspiring. At sight of me he swung his feet to the floor with a bang and moved out an extra chair.

"Lo, Minturn! Nasty morning!"

I sat down. "Did you get me out of bed just to tell me something I could see from my window?"

Lyons grunted, and glanced around the room. We were alone. He looked steadily at me for a space. "Seen Chan Wan lately?"

"Last night."

"Say anything—particular?"

"Why, no," I replied; and I remember how his sharp eyes searched my face. "Why?"

For reply, Lyons picked up a sheet of paper and handed it to me. I knew instantly that it was from some Chinese, for I have never known a Caucasian to use that peculiar rice paper. It was written, however, in English, and in a rather feminine hand.

I read the letter out loud:

Mr. Lyons—You better watch out for Chan Wan. Some bad Chinese have hired Ah Hing to kill him. I tell you because Chan Wan is friend mine long time. Also killing makes bad business for Chinatown.

From a good Chinaman.

Surprise, as I read this letter, was swiftly overshadowed by dismay and alarm. Chen and I were old friends, having met years ago when I was doing "under cover" work for the Treasury Department, and later while I was studying Oriental languages at the U. C. He was one of the finest types of the younger Chinese that I have ever met; quiet, perfect in his manners, impatient at times with the old customs of his people, and somewhat too eager to have them adopt American ways. I knew that his fearless fight against the

iniquitous tong system had made him many powerful enemies in Chinatown, and that more than once his life had hung by the merest thread. Now, it seemed, definite plans had been made to murder him.



"Well?" Lyons' harsh voice broke in impatiently. "What do you know about it?"

"No more than you," I replied. "You know Chen has tried to stop the tong wars, that he has tried to get them to go back to their original ben-evilent purpose, and that

there is a price on his head, placed there by the gang of professional blackmailers and killers who have gained control of the Hep Ben tong and corrupted it to what it is today. And you know as well as I do that if Chen Wan is murdered it will be one of the blackest deeds in all of Chinatown's black history."

"You're excited!" scoffed Lyons. "Get down to earth! Do you know this bird they have hired—this Ah Hing?"

"There are many Ah Hings in Chinatown," I replied testily. "The *Ah*, as you know, is merely a meaningless syllable. Hing is the given name. Without the family name we cannot identify him. Ah Hing, alone, is about the same as saying, 'Hey, John.'"

"I suppose I know him," mused Lyons; "but not by that name. What do you make of the letter? Any idea who this 'good Chinaman' is who wrote it?"

"Not the slightest. I judge from the phrasing that it was written by some Chinese who uses broken English. That's all I see."

"Fine! All we gotta do is find a Chink who uses broken English! Minturn, you'd make a big killin' as a detectakive! Listen! Would a Chink who uses broken English be able to write such a good hand? And wouldn't he—or *she*—misspell a word now and then? Of course! This letter was written by some educated man—or *woman*—who slung in them queer phrases just to throw me off the track."

I looked the letter over again. "I believe you're right," I agreed, and then threw the letter back on his desk. "But what of it? What does that signify?"

Lyons leaned back in his chair. His big, blunt fingers began drumming on the desk.

"I don't know," he said, shaking his head. "I wish I—"

He stopped abruptly at the sound of the hall door being opened. I don't know why we looked around so sharply. I remember thinking that it was probably one of the detectives coming in for day duty, or perhaps someone calling to report a theft. But it wasn't. As the door swung back slowly we saw an old Chinese standing, hesitantly in the doorway.

He was an old man with hideously gaunt face and burning eyes. A shabby blouse and cheap cotton trousers hung loosely over his frail body. I remember the thought came to me that I had seen this man before; but that was nothing. There is something about every Chinese that reminds one of some other.

The caller lifted a bony hand and removed his greasy cap. "Hullo," he said, tonelessly.

"Hello, Hoppy!" snapped Lyons. "Whaddye want?"

Old Hoppy! I remembered him then! Chinatown's oldest opium smoker, a pitiful relic of a day gone by!

"Mista Lyons," said Hoppy, in that same toneless voice, "my name—Ah Hing."

I saw Lyons' big shoulders and bullet head draw in; his eyes stabbed at the letter lying on his desk, flashed up at me warningly, then switched to the face of old Hoppy Hing.

"Come in!" he ordered. "Shut the door!"

I started to my feet, but Lyons motioned me down. The old man, meanwhile, shuffled in and closed the door. He stood now by Lyons' desk, his gaunt face expressionless save for the burning eyes—eyes in which lay all the tell-tale scars of the confirmed "hop."

I remember the sense of relief that swept over me then. Opium smokers are notoriously untrustworthy. Ah Hing had been hired to slay Chen Wan, a man against whom he had no enmity. Some memory, perhaps, in his drug-darkened mind had awakened at the last moment; and instead of carrying out the evil plot he had come to tell Lyons all about it.

I looked at Lyons and prayed that he wouldn't bungle things. Face to face now with the big, rough-handed detective, Ah Hing might lose his courage and back out. I could see that his hands—long bony hands dangling beneath the frayed sleeves of his blouse—were trembling violently.

"All right, Ah Hing," said Lyons eagerly; "tell us all about it."

Ah Hing gulped nervously. "Chen Wan—"

"Yes," said Lyons as Ah Hing hesitated, "tell us about Chen Wan."

"Jus' now—I kill'em."

Never can I forget the unearthly monotone in which the old man uttered that sentence. It was like some ghastly, irrevocable voice from the tomb. In the dead silence that followed, I became aware of shuffling steps out in the hall. Someone laughed boisterously.

Then Lyons and I were on our feet. The big detective seized Ah Hing by the shoulders, a crushing grip that made the old man quail. He tried to draw back from the officer's out-thrust jaws and blazing eyes.

"You did it, eh? You did it, you damned yellow murderer!"

Ah Hing nodded his head stupidly. "I kill'em," he repeated in that same expressionless voice.

Lyons stared at the man for a moment, then released him. Swiftly, the detective's big hands went over Ah Hing's body looking for weapons. Finding none, he shoved the old man down into the chair I had vacated.

"Are you sure about it?" I spoke up. "Is—is Chen dead?"

Ah Hing raised a bony hand. "*K'u kwo shan lok,*" he said in that same ghastly tone; "he is dead."

"Who paid you to do it?" demanded Lyons. "The truth now!"

Ah Hing shook his head. "No pay," he muttered; "no pay." And then, in his broken English he told how he had gone down the hall and rapped on Chen Wan's door. Chen had admitted him without question. As Chen turned around to close the door, Ah Hing had struck. One swift, savage lunge with the Chinese knife—and the thing was done.

I shuddered at the picture drawn so cold-bloodedly by old Hing. The act was so utterly wanton. Chen had known all along that his life was in danger; yet, because it was against his principles, he had steadily refused to hire gunmen to protect him. He had trusted Ah Hing, and Ah Hing had taken advantage of it. What the old man lacked in strength he made up with his devilish Oriental knowledge of just how to wield the long blade.

His reason for coming direct from the scene of his crime to confess was typical of Chinese reasoning: "I'm ol' man—no money—no flends. Mebbe soon I die anyway."

Lyons turned to me. "I don't think he worked alone, but there's no use in trying to get anything out of him now. We'll hit for Chinatown right now. I'll phone the wagon from there. Lord, man, I wish I didn't have to do this! Chen Wan was my friend—the whitest man in Chinatown."

At that I caught old Hing by the shoulder, whirled him around. "Why did you do it?" I flung at him in angry Cantonese. "Why did you kill Chen Wan?"

At the sound of his own language coming from my lips, Ah Hing started vio-

lently. His eyes blazed at me for an instant, then shifted. "No sabby," he muttered; "no sabby."

"You speak falsely!" I cried in the awkward phrasing of the Cantonese.

"Listen to me, Ah Hing—for the murder of my friend, Chen Wan, you are going to prison and you are going to have a rope put around your neck and hang until you are dead. Hear that? Now tell me all, quickly! Who paid you to do this thing?"

A spasm shot through Ah Hing's wasted frame. Without looking up at me, he spoke in that same dull monotone; but he spoke this time in his own Cantonese.

"Chen Wan was my enemy. I have killed him, as was my duty. As for your prison, I do not care. I am an old man. It is time for me to die. *Tsau kom lok!*"

We were soon on our way to Chinatown, Lyons and I together, Ah Hing trailing along some distance behind in the charge of Squadman Darwood.

Chen Wan's rooms were on Canton Street but, like so many buildings in Chinatown, there was an alley entrance. I was not surprised when Lyons went down this alley to the rear of the building where Chen roomed.

Lyons paused there in the drizzling rain and busied himself lighting a cigar; but I knew that all the time his sharp little eyes were taking in the surroundings—the narrow alley, the shadowy stairways, fire-escapes and irregular roofs. There were quite a few Chinese about, for an alley in Chinatown is not always a dumping place; more often it is a very narrow but very busy thoroughfare. It was a motley stream, ranging from a fat and repulsive butcher in filthy overalls to a dignified old



merchant in crinkly black satin and carrying a gold-handled umbrella; but they were all moving. No one seemed to be interested in the stairway that led up to Chen's rooms.

These rooms were on the second floor of a small brick building just across the alley from where we stood. I noticed that his two windows were closed save for a space of several inches from the top and that the shades were down. I said nothing about this, for Lyons knew Chen Wan's habits as well as I, the two of us having visited Chen many, many times. When Lyons crossed the alley I waited until he had vanished in the stairway, then followed. Once out of sight, I quickened my steps and caught up with Lyons as he turned off the stairs at the second floor.

The main hallway, narrow, gloomy and deserted so far as I could see, was in the form of an L. Chen Wan's door was around the corner at the extreme end of the hall. Lyons paused at the head of the stairs as though listening, but I could hear nothing save the monotonous drum of the rain on the tin roof. Then we started down the hall, our footsteps making no noise on the matting that covered the floor.

We were almost to the turn in the hall when I got a shock. I could not say that I saw the man. My mind was on the ghastly thought of what we must face in Chen Wan's room, my gaze on the broad shoulders and bullet head of Detective Lyons just ahead of me. Yet, as we passed the embrasure of a deep and gloomy doorway I was sure that I caught the flash of slant eyes; and I felt, more than saw, that someone crouched there in the shadows.

One learns many lessons in Chinatown; and I had learned enough that I refrained from turning my head. Around the corner, out of sight, I caught Lyons by the arm and with my hands cupped over his big ear whispered what I had seen. I knew by the look that flashed over his face that he was thinking the same as I—that anyone hiding in that gloomy hall was not there for any good purpose.

Then I saw him turn and look down the hall toward Chen's door. This door, dimly visible in the half-dark, was at the end of the hall, as I have said, and facing us. At the left of the door was a very narrow passage that served only as an outlet to the fire-escape on the alley. Lyons knew this; and I felt that I knew what was passing through his mind. I was not surprised when he motioned for me to be

silent, turned and tiptoed back to the corner.

Lyons was just turning the corner when I heard Chen's door open. Astonished, I whirled around and shrank back against the wall.

There was a light in Chen's room. Silhouetted against that light, two people stood in the open doorway. One was a Chinese girl whom I instantly recognized as Lo Shan, a tea-server in the East Wind café. She was clad, as usual, in odd but modest Chinese pantaloons and tight-fitting blouse of blue satin embroidered with silk that glistened in the light. Her black hair, done in that queer Oriental style, was aglitter with ornaments of gold and jade. She was crying.

The other person was Chen Wan!

What reaction I may have felt on discovering that my friend Chen was alive, I do not recall; for Chen's door was no sooner open than things happened swiftly.

The two saw me and stopped short, the girl with a little gasp, Chen with a sudden stiffening of his body. I felt certain that Chen did not recognize me; and I opened my mouth to speak, but instead, I shouted a warning as I saw what neither Chen nor the girl saw—a figure glide from the passageway on the left. Swiftly as light my mind registered two things—the black slouch hat of the tongman, the flash of an upraised knife.

I shouted, but my voice was buried in the smashing roar of Lyons' revolver.

The girl screamed. I heard Chen utter a cry. Blinded by the stinging powder smoke I could not see Chen nor the girl.

I looked around at Lyons. He was crouching low, his gun gripped close to his body, his big jaws thrust out, his little eyes blazing through half closed lids.

Then Lyons whirled suddenly and vanished around the corner. Again his big police revolver sent a crashing reverberation through the hall. I turned then and ran down the hall toward Chen's door. "Chen!" I cried; "it's I—Minturn!"

Chen Wan looked up at me, at the girl crouching against the wall, her jeweled hands over her face; then he pointed to the tongman lying on the floor.

"So I see," said Chen Wan with his devilish calmness. "And I suppose it was Lyons who did this."

"Yes," I answered, and I could not down a shudder. The bullet from the detective's big gun had caught the tongman on the left temple and smashed clear through the front of his head, passing out at the other

temple. It was a ghastly, but instantly fatal wound.

Perceiving that Chen was in no need of help, I turned again and ran back to give Lyons a hand; but that proved to be unnecessary.



I found him snapping the cuffs on the man I had seen hiding in the doorway.

Then, Squadman Darwood, gun in hand, came pounding up the stairs.

"Where's Ah Hing?" demanded Lyons.

"I parked him with Westcott and——"

"Tell Westcott to stand below and keep everybody out. Then you get Ah Hing!"

Darwood left. Detective Lyons turned to me. "Into Chen's room!" he barked. "We'll get at the bottom of this now!"

By the time Darwood returned with Ah Hing we were all in Chen Wan's room. Lyons' prisoner, gagged and handcuffed, was hidden in a closet. The dead tongman lay on the floor, a towel over his face; Chen Wan, at Lyons' orders, stood behind the bed-screen.

Detective Lyons pointed down at the dead man, but his little eyes were fastened on the face of old Ah Hing. "So you did that, eh?" he barked. "You killed Chen Wan?"

Ah Hing lifted unblinking eyes and faced the detective's gaze. "I killem," he declared, and nodded his head.

"All right, boys!" Lyons called out; and at his signal the towel was snatched off the face of the dead tongman, the prisoner was brought from the closet, and Chen Wan stepped from behind the screen and faced Ah Hing.

There was a moment of tense silence. I was looking at Ah Hing, amazed by the devilishly inhuman coolness with which he faced that disclosure. Not a muscle of his saffron face moved as he looked steadily at Detective Lyons; and presently I saw the light in his eyes grow dull, a transformation that is only one of the amazing peculiarities of the Oriental eye, and one that I can liken only to when one views the windows of a room from which the light is slowly withdrawn. I knew what that meant. Ah Hing had closed the windows of his soul. Come what may, he would tell the "foreign devil" police—nothing!

The silence was broken by the sharp

crackling of a match. I looked around. Chen Wan was calmly lighting a cigarette.

"Mr. Lyons," he said, in his carefully enunciated English, "Lo Shan has told me all."

I remember how everyone looked suddenly at the girl. She was standing by the wall farthest from us as though trying to shrink from our sight. Now she averted her face quickly, but not before I saw that she was no longer crying, that her dark eyes held a look of exultant and defiant happiness.

Then we were listening to the cool incisive voice of Chen Wan as he told us of the plot against his life, a conspiracy so fantastic in its conception that outside of Chinatown the thing would seem incredible.

"You have sent so many tong-killers to prison the past year that they are becoming afraid of the American police," said Chen Wan. "They plan a killing with the utmost care, and yet every time, some tongman goes to prison. They say it isn't always the right tongman, but the result, so far as the tongs are concerned, is the same. Eh, Lyons?"

"Go on with your story," said the big detective, grinning.

Chen Wan smiled. "So—by a devious course of Chinese reasoning they arrived at the conclusion that the only sure way of murdering me without having a police investigation and another tongman sent to prison was to find someone who, while not willing to commit an actual crime, would obligingly confess to the crime and take the consequences.

"Ah Hing, as you would say, filled the bill. He is an old man with neither friends nor money; and, what is worse, he is a slave to opium. The only reason he hasn't killed himself is that he can't pay his debts. You smile at that, Mr. Lyons; but that is because, after all, you do not know the Chinese mind like Minturn and I know it. To commit suicide is honorable; but to do so without first paying one's obligations—well, it simply isn't done, as Minturn would say.

"But these plotters showed Ah Hing a way out. No sum of money could induce him to commit the actual crime; but since I was to be slain anyway, he saw no reason why he should not profit by it. So, on consideration that they promise to pay all his debts, Ah Hing agreed to confess to murdering me—and take the consequences.

"Of course, these two men, who were to do the actual slaying, had no dealings with Ah Hing. All arrangements were made

by Wo Sang, whom we shall have no trouble locating. To make the case even stronger against Ah Hing, this Wo Sang had a letter written telling you that Ah Hing had been hired to kill me. Wo Sang set the hour of my death, and told Ah Hing to be in the alley beneath my window at that time. It was agreed that when the deed had been done, one of these men would put his hand against the window pane. Ah Hing, seeing the hand at the window, was to go at once to the police station and confess.

"These arrangements were finally settled only last night at the East Wind café. Lo Shan happened to overhear enough that she could guess the rest. Being a Chinese girl, I doubt if the thought of telephoning to the American police ever occurred to her; and if it had, she would have been too much afraid of tong vengeance to do it. So, trying to decide what she should do, she did nothing until the last minute, then came to my room to warn me.

"Hearing the rap on my door, and being suspicious, I opened the door cautiously. Lo Shan rushed in and, before I could stop her, went to my window. She had seen Ah Hing waiting in the alley. She knew what he was waiting for. Keeping her face out of sight, she put her hand against the window pane.

"Of course, I was alarmed. I thought it was a trap; and in my anger and her agitation, it was some time before I could get the truth from her. Then when I realized what the girl had done, I drew the shades so she would not be seen, and waited for you, wishing all the time that I had a telephone in my room.

"Lo Shan, however, did not like to wait. She did not want you men to find her here. There, again, you have the Chinese mind. In coming to my room, Lo Shan has done a very improper and shameful thing. That she did it to save my life is very little consolation to a girl who is steeped

with four thousand years of Chinese mor-



ality. Understanding that, I kept her here only until I felt sure that the tongmen had given up their attack and that you were almost here.

"You know the rest. The tongmen were waiting in the hall. Probably they had seen Lo Shan but did not guess that she had come to warn me and so were waiting until she should leave. In the gloom, Lo Shan mistook my friend Minturn for a highbinder and, save for Mr. Lyons' splendid aim, the tongman waiting outside my door would have finished his job after all. Too bad!" Chen concluded abruptly.

"Whaddye mean?" This came quick from Lyons.

"Nothing—really," Chen replied, and I noticed that he did not look at Lyons. At the time I thought nothing of it; but later—I think it was a week after that exciting morning—I happened to meet Chen at the Custom-house.

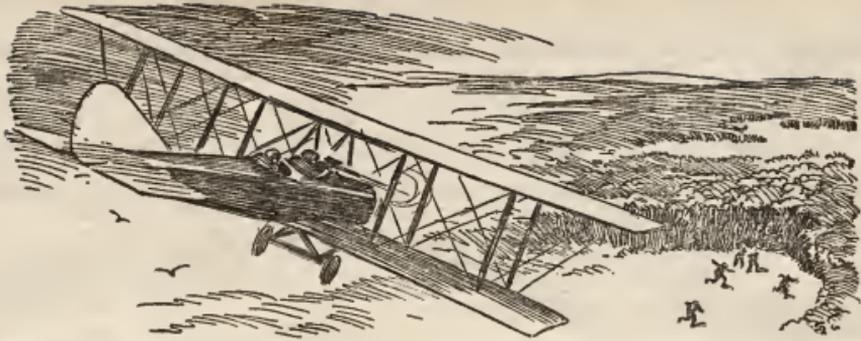
"How's old Ah Hing?" I inquired.

With his thumbnail, Chen Wan snapped a match. Over the flame I saw mocking lights in his long dark eyes.

"Why, that was quite a joke on me," he said in his crisp colloquial English. "When his deal with the tongs fell through he was in the same predicament as before—too honorable to slay himself with his debts unpaid, and unable to earn money to pay them. So, feeling that I should do something for him, I took up all his obligations and made him a present of ten dollars. Then to my surprise, to my very great surprise, Ah Hing spent the whole sum for opium—and died happy."

PRIMITIVE TEST FOR SOIL FERTILITY

THE early settlers of Kentucky had a peculiar test for determining the fertility of new lands, and while it appears to us to be a very unscientific one, nevertheless it was universally used and relied on. It consisted of digging a hole in the ground and then filling it with the removed soil. If the earth taken out would not fill up the hole when lightly thrown back in, the soil was considered to be fruitful; and *vice versa*. A common example of this matter of soil replacement may be seen to-day in connection with grave-digging, for, notwithstanding the addition of a coffin, seldom can graves be completely filled in with the earth taken from them, and in time they sink considerably below the level of the surrounding ground. The Kentucky soil test was known as "Virgil's."—C. E. M.



MOONLIGHT AND MOONSHINE

By THOMSON BURTIS

Author of "Texas Steerers," "Release," etc.

GEORGE ARLINGTON HEMINGWOOD, OF THE AIR SERVICE, DIDN'T CARE WHAT THOSE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINEERS DID SO LONG AS THEY DIDN'T DO IT TO HIM. BUT WHEN A BULLET IN THE ENGINE OF HIS SOARING PLANE MADE HIM TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LAND ON TREE-TOPS AND LIVE, HE CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS TIME TO START SOMETHING

LIEUTENANT GEORGE ARLINGTON HEMINGWOOD, of the Hemingwoods of Boston, was wrestling with a problem. Having applied soothing lotions to his freshly shaved and smarting face, and put the last touches to the part in his black hair, he continued to stare into the small mirror and wonder whether he ought to do it or not.

He leaned over until his deeply tanned face was within an inch of the glass and inspected in detail the small, close-cropped black mustache which adorned his upper lip. It was a fairly luxuriant mustache, as those hirsute adornments go, but it did not quite satisfy his critical eye. Was it worth while to shave it off in the hope that two hairs would sprout where but one had grown before?

Let it go as it was, he decided.

Having decided this burning question, Hemingwood proceeded leisurely to don his tan serge shirt. He had no further interest in his face, although that, like its principal ornament, was a good enough specimen of its kind. A bit round, perhaps, and certainly very brown, but lighted amazingly by a pair of sparkling brown eyes and a wide, good humored mouth

which was usually curved in either a smile or a grin. If not, it conveyed the impression that it would stretch into one or the other at the slightest provocation.

It was the face of a contented and cheery person, both of which George Arlington Hemingwood was. Being a first lieutenant in the Air Service satisfied him completely and he had little more to ask from fate. The future was pleasant to his mind's eye. He wasted no thought whatever on his prospects. He could not have told you where he stood on the promotion list, because he did not care particularly whether he ever became a captain or not.

Life, as it was and as he lived it, was a good invention of the Lord's to his mind. The two rooms he occupied, with walls of beaverboard and a leak in the ceiling, were comfortable enough to live in and far more appealing than the shadowed confines of



the Hemingwood residence on Beacon Hill, and, although his father's bank was a fine big bank and his father's son could lead an enviable commercial exist-

ence therein, the cockpit of a De Haviland airplane was infinitely more desirable.

This despite the fact that George Arlington Hemingwood had led a wild, not to say sensational existence during his five years of flying. From Long Island to the Philippines, and from Selfredge Field on the Canadian border to France Field in Panama he was known as the unluckiest flyer still above the ground instead of under it. He could handle a ship along with the best; that was conceded. However, there appeared to be a conspiracy of motors and the elements against him. He had had more forced landings by half than any other flyer on the list. And almost invariably they occurred over such choice bits of country as the Everglades, the wilder sections of the Mexican border, Chesapeake Bay, the Rockies, and similar traps for unwary airplanes.

He had been rescued thirty miles out at sea during the bombing maneuvers at Langham Field, Virginia; he had laid amid the wreckage of his ship in the Big Bend for two days, without food or water, and been found by a miracle; he had landed in a canyon in Arizona and wandered for a week in the mountains; he had been shot down three times in France, and a list of the injuries he had encountered would include mention of a considerable percentage of the bones of the human body. Always, however, George Arlington Hemingwood bobbed up serenely, cursing his luck with fluency and grinning.

His whole souled enjoyment of life extended to flying, and was not dampened by the crack-ups thereof.

Having found his big Stetson, he adjusted it on his head at the precise angle which appealed to his liking in these matters. Even with the aid of that impressive twenty dollar chapeau he did not look like a man whose hand had frequently been outstretched to greet St. Peter; who was on speaking terms, as it were, with the life hereafter. He was slightly under medium height, and looked a bit shorter than his five feet seven and a half because of a pair of powerful shoulders. He was impeccably arrayed, as always; he was careful about those things. It was characteristic that the insignia of rank and branch of service on his collar were placed with exactitude.

He strolled out through his sitting room—the shabbily comfortable and muchly cluttered domicile of a care free bachelor—and down the long hall, emerging into the warm sunlight of a spring afternoon in

Kentucky. Springtime in Kentucky is a savory season, and four of the flyers of Goddard Field were taking advantage of it by laying at full length on the grass in front of the barracks.



Directly across the road four corrugated iron hangars squatted in a row, paralleling the line of buildings of which the officers' quarters was one. On the other side of the hangars was Goddard Field, a small, rough air-drome which sloped down to the great artillery camp which spread out for two square miles at its foot. Like the buildings of the flying detachment, Camp Henry's barracks and stables had never been painted, and the big cantonment looked aged and infirm, which it was.

"What is the subject of discussion?" enquired Hemingwood as he ignited a cheroot.

"Snapper is trying to justify the fact that he possesses a new fiancée by spacious arguments in favor of marriage," returned big blonde Morrison.

"Of course, looking at it impartially and without prejudice, marriage is a sucker game from a man's viewpoint," stated Hemingwood weightily.

"What do you mean?" enquired Snapper MacNeil belligerently. The wiry, red-headed little flyer was a heaven-sent victim for serious persiflage, and was very much in love.

"Aside from the temporary state of insanity known as love, the state has no arguments in its favor from a man's viewpoint," pursued Hemingwood. "Look at the expense, for one thing. However, cheer up, Snapper, even marriage has its points. Don't think I consider it an unmitigated evil. You can't—"

"Beg pardon, sir," said a voice at Hemingwood's elbow. "Major Williamson's compliments and will the lieutenant report to headquarters immediately?"

Tall, gaunt Private Rose, perpetual orderly of the officers' barracks, stood at rigid attention and spewed these words forth as though in mortal fear of forgetting one if he stopped.

"Be right over, Rose," nodded Hemingwood. So saying, he turned on his heel and left them spellbound.

He strolled toward headquarters, wondering what was up. Some new job, prob-

ably. As photographic officer his duties were by no means onerous, and consequently he had a great fear that lightning would strike, at any moment, in the form of an order assigning him to some prosaic task "in addition to his other duties."

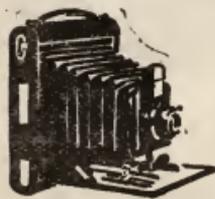
However, his fears were groundless. He found Major Williamson enthroned behind his desk, arguing acrimoniously with Gobel, the sandy-haired and excitable adjutant. The C. O. fought frequently with Gobel for the purpose of prodding the adjutant until he started pounding the desk, which he frequently did.

"Washington has at last discovered that there's a photographic section hidden away here," the major told him. "You're due for a sojourn in the back hills of Kentucky, where moonshine grows on bushes and rifle bullets flow like water."

The orders were brief and to the point. Hemingwood was to make a mosaic of the Salters River between the villages of Laport and Herkimer. That would be about thirty miles, Hemingwood reflected. The mosaic was to include all the territory for five miles on each side of the river. Three hundred square miles, which was several days work. It was for the use of the geological survey, according to the order, and was to be accomplished without delay.

Hemingwood was delighted. He was whistling cheerfully as he made off to interview Apperson and get things in readiness for a week's stay in the wilderness.

He found Sergeant Apperson, his chief non-com, in the photo hut. Apperson was a gray-haired veteran who was as reliable as a tax collector and knew more about cameras than the inventors thereof. Anything from a pocket machine to a motion picture outfit was in his professional bailiwick. He was a wiry, weather-beaten little



Scotchman who retained a trace of the brogue of his youth.

"We'll have oor base oot yonder, no doot?" he queried. "We'll be ready in the mornin', sir-r-r!"

The invaluable Apperson was likewise an excellent mechanic in addition to his other praiseworthy talents, so Hemingwood told him to have the ship warmed and ready by six in the morning. Whereupon he dismissed everything from his mind, Apperson never failed.

AT PRECISELY six-forty-five next morning Hemingwood was commencing to look for the Salters River, which was his principal landmark to aid in finding East Point. For a half hour he had been flying over the mountains. As far as the eye could see, even from the airy perch of three thousand feet, low rolling, heavily wooded hills rolled away to the skyline. It was not difficult to believe the bloody history of those thousands of acres of unkempt wilderness as one looked down on the grim fastnesses which hid in their depths a strange breed who lived and fought and died in a shadowed, primitive world of their own. George himself had had a sample of the suspicious mountain people when he had been forced to land in the hills a few months before.

Another flyer would have been taut with the strain of flying continuously over a wilderness which presented no possible landing field. The failure of two or three cylinders of the twelve-cylinder, four hundred and fifty horsepower Liberty meant crashing into the trees at seventy miles an hour. But no worry bothered George Arlington Hemingwood. His untroubled eyes scanned the glistening instruments, and he enjoyed the ride. He couldn't be worried until disaster actually overtook him. The specially built ship, carrying a hundred and thirty-five gallons of gas, roared along over the mountains at a hundred miles an hour. To offset the extra weight of gas, oil, and electric cameras, it was streamlined to the last possible degree, and it was a tribute to Appersons' loving care down to the last turnbuckle glistening in the morning sun.

Finally the tiny stream came in sight, and he swung southward. It twined along between the mountains, sometimes in deep gorges and sometimes level with tiny fields on its banks.

Herkimer came in sight, and he instantly vetoed the one field near it. It was ploughed land and the furrows were high and soft.

He sped along over the village, and deeper up into the mountains. Herkimer was lost to sight almost immediately.



There was a three minute interval when he only picked up one cabin.

Then East Point came in sight, and proved to be a pleasant surprise. It was larger than Herkimer, despite having no railroad, and the wide main street was shaded with towering trees. It was set at the base of a mountain, and for a half mile westward small cleared fields occupied the tiny valley floor. There were small ploughed fields on the mountainsides, too, gleaming white against the green of the woods.

Hemingwood, scrutinizing the ground closely, finally found a field, although it was not as near town as he would have liked. It was a long, narrow grass clearing just below the crest of the mountain behind East Point, on the slope opposite the town. Four miles east of the clearing there was a small settlement which was not on his map.

He throttled the motor to a thousand revolutions a minute and dropped down for a look. He could see the residents of East Point popping forth from their houses for a look at the visitor from the sky. There would be some excitement down there, he soliloquized. He noticed a solitary horseman toiling up the road from East Point to that settlement, whatever its name was. The road led past his prospective landing place, which would make transportation of gas and oil a simple matter.

The field lay north and south, with an eastern slope. It was surrounded by towering trees on three sides, but to the north, where the road skirted it, there was a good approach.

He swooped down within ten feet of the ground and flashed across it for a detailed inspection. It rolled slightly and the grass was four or five inches long. A few rocks protruded from the vegetation, but the middle of the clearing seemed to be without obstacles.

He decided immediately to try it. As he zoomed upward and turned northward to land over the road he looked around at the imperturbable Apperson. He pointed down at the field, and Apperson removed his pipe and nodded. Not in approval; merely understanding. Apperson considered everything in the photo section as his business, except flying. This he left entirely to Hemingwood. If his chief had indicated the Ohio River as a landing place, Apperson would have nodded.

Hemingwood came in low over the thin fringe of trees, cutting the motor grad-

ually. The heavy ship had almost lost speed when it was over the road, and was mushing downward. Hemingwood stabbed the throttle ahead for a second as the DeHaviland settled over the fence. The spurt of power held the nose up a second more, and the stick was back in his lap when the ship hit on three points in a hard stall landing. It rolled with slackening speed up a small hump in the field, picked up again as it rolled down the other side, and stopped at the top of the second fold, a safe hundred yards from the southern boundary. It was flying as perfect as it was unconsciously skillful.

Hemingwood gave it the gun and taxied to the fence. He turned off the gasoline feed, ran the motor out, and clicked off the switches.

"I'll take a constitutional down to the city, Apperson, and see where we sleep and eat, if any. Likewise where we get gas and oil, and how. I guess you'd better stay here. There'll be the usual mob of people show up, I suppose."

"Quite so," nodded Apperson, raising his yellow tinted goggles deliberately. "Ye'll have transportation to get the bags into town, no doot."

"Uh-huh. I'll be back in a couple of hours—by the time the sun gets right for pictures, anyhow."

He climbed out, lit a cigaret, and surveyed the cloudless sky with satisfaction.

The mosaic would be taken from eleven thousand feet, and even a few cumulous clouds would mean great gaps in the pictures. It looked like a good working day.

Apperson was busy in the back cockpit, unwiring divers articles he had packed away there. He could fit anything up to an automobile into the cockpit of a ship. Article after article materialized from the mystic depths, until it was a problem where the sergeant himself had ridden.

Hemingwood took off his flying suit and made off without further ado. It was about three miles over the mountain to East Point, he estimated, and it would be a phenomenon if he did not meet a procession of cars, one of which would be delighted to turn around and give him a lift.

He had proceeded up the dusty road for a half mile, and had just reached the crest



of the hill when a horseman hove in sight. The one he had seen from the air, probably. He did not seem in a hurry, for the horse was ambling along at pretty much his own gait.

Suddenly Hemingwood's dark eyes lighted with interest and he became conscious that his face was undoubtedly spotted with oil. That was a woman on that horse, riding astride. Furthermore, she was a young woman. A big, white Panama hat, shaped like a man's shaded her face, and her costume consisted of khaki riding trousers, leather boots, and a white blouse.

In a few seconds he was able to state with conviction that not only was the rider a young woman, but that she was also a most remarkably attractive specimen of her sex. And George Arlington Hemingwood was not a man who allowed opportunity to knock at his door without an answer. He stopped a few feet in front of the horse and smiled up at the girl.

"I beg your pardon, but could you tell me the name of the town that seems to be at the end of this road?"

Her piquant face, framed by the Panama and bobbed hair, dimpled slightly as she pulled up her horse.

"Which end of the road?" she enquired.

"The one I'm headed for—it seemed to be the biggest."

"East Point," she informed him. "Did you have a forced landing?"

"You talk like a flyer!" grinned Hemingwood. "No, I came down on purpose. I thought I was near East Point, but it's hard to tell from the air. Particularly in such thickly settled country," he added.

She chuckled, a peculiarly infectious performance as she accomplished it. She was a tiny little thing, Hemingwood thought, and her small oval face with its saucily tilted nose and rather wide mouth possessed a charm which far transcended the mere beauty of more regular features. She did not look as if a resident of the mountains.

"You know, pretty lady, I've read a few flying stories in some of our magazines, and in every one some beautiful girl always materializes as soon as an airplane lands," he remarked. "They just pop out of bushes in the wilderness or from behind sand hummocks in the desert. But in five years of flying its the first time I've seen it happen!"

"Well, this is the first time you've ever landed anywhere near me," she returned, mirth in her gray eyes.

"My mistake!" laughed Hemingwood.

"I wonder if you could give me some information. I expect to be in your village, or above it, for a few days, taking pictures of this flock of mountains. If they rolled Kentucky out flat it would be bigger than Texas."

She laughed aloud this time. Her face had an out-of-doors look about it, just a hint of golden tan and red cheeks with the color underneath the skin instead of on top of it.

"The main things I want to know are as follows: where can my trusty sergeant and myself procure beds and boards for ourselves? And is there any garage in town where we can buy gasoline and oil?"

"That last remark is an insult!" she said severely. "I ought to ride off and leave you standing here after that insinuation against East Point. However, you're a stranger. My uncle has practically the only store in East Point. He sells gasoline and oil."

"He must be a good business man, judging by his choice of salesmen," commented Hemingwood.

"That's the secret of his success," she confided smilingly. "About the boarding house, I don't know. We have no regular hotel or even boarding house, but I guess my uncle could tell you where to go."

"And your uncle's name is——"

"Mumford. You can't miss the store. There's a big sign on it."

"Do you think you could stand it if I introduced myself?" enquired Hemingwood.

"I might."

"Hemingwood—George Hemingwood, hailing at present from Camp Henry."

"How do you do, Lieutenant Hemingwood," she smiled. "Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"Be a nice day if the weather doesn't change, Miss Blank," agreed the flyer.

"I'll let you substitute Morgan in the blank. Are we ordinary people on the ground to be allowed to look at your airplane?"

"I'll show you the sights myself."

She glanced down at the tiny gold watch on her wrist.

"Ten minutes of nine! I've got to hurry. I'm a hard working school-marm, you see. But I do want to see your plane, lieutenant."

"What time do you get through for the day?"

"Four o'clock."

"Are you riding to school? Come back this way?"

"Yes."

"I'll be waiting at the ship for you. I want to be present when you see it, because it all sounds so much more impressive as I explain things."

"I will be supposed to worship in silent awe, perhaps?"

"You be interested, and I'll do the worshipping," grinned Hemingwood.

"You don't appear to be of the reverent sort. However, I'll look forward to it. Good-by until this afternoon!"

She threw him a smile and urged her fat white horse into a lumbering gallop.



"She's no East Point girl; she's just out of college and getting a year's experience or something!" soliloquized Hemingwood. "Must be

some little schoolhouse up at that settlement I saw from the air. Cute kid, and she knows what it's all about too."

He resumed his pilgrimage to East Point, musing contentedly on the prospect before him. He had not proceeded five hundred yards, however, before loud clanking and rattling announced the fact that there was a vehicle approaching. A battered Ford truck bounced into sight and clattered up to him, slowing gradually. Loose tools in the rear were responsible for the weird combination of noises given forth by the flivver. Two men were in the seat. The truck stopped alongside the flyer, and the fat man at the wheel hailed him.

"Mornin'! Git down all right?"

"Yes, thanks. Nothing the matter. Landed on purpose."

"I see. Lookin' fur anything special around hyar?"

The driver's round, red face was the setting for a pair of small, green eyes en-cased in rolls of fat. He was dressed in greasy mechanic clothing and a battered felt hat. His companion was a gaunt man of middle age, boasting a drooping mustache and a melancholy look.

"I'm going to town to look for gas and oil and a place to sleep right now."

"Climb in hyar, and I'll take yuh t' town," offered the fat man, who seemed to be making a determined effort to be genial.

Without a word his companion uncoiled

his long length and languidly transferred himself into the rear of the truck. He was dressed in a black shirt and dirty khaki trousers and his felt hat was in as decrepit a condition as the driver's.

The Ford had barely turned around when the vanguard of the sightseers passed in two flivvers, both loaded to the guards with coatless men of all ages. They peered at Hemingwood with concentrated attention as they dashed by.

"I keep the garage hyar an' I c'n let yuh have all the gas yuh want," offered the driver.

"Well, I've made arrangements in advance with Mr. Mumford," lied Hemingwood.

Just why he had said it he did not know. It was an impulse, but a sensible one. He intended to buy the gas of Mumford because of the girl, and he might as well avoid antagonizing anyone in East Point if he could.

The driver grunted. He was plainly disappointed.

"Gettin' right out?" he enquired.

"No, I'll be here several days."

The man glanced at him quickly, and the flyer felt instinctively that the man behind him was staring at him steadily and listening closely.

"What fur?"

The forthright question was like a blow.

"I was sent here to take a lot of pictures from the air," Hemingwood explained.

He felt the tenseness in the atmosphere, and was well aware of the attitude of mountaineers regarding any stranger, particularly a Government man. Consequently he went to some pains to describe his mission exactly. Apparently he did not satisfy the fat garage man entirely, though. Hemingwood was somewhat puzzled. It would have been more explainable if the man had been a mountaineer. Perhaps he was, and had graduated into a business in town. No reason why a man couldn't make moonshine just because he lived in town, either, he reflected.

Several more cars passed them, all filled with passengers. Three men on horseback and two buckboards were included in the procession. When they turned into the wide dirt street of East Point there were knots of people, mostly women, talking on the sidewalks. They were plainly curious, and Hemingwood was the target for severe inspection and several pointing fingers.

Most of the houses were small frame

buildings, neatly painted, and interspersed with several tumble-down shacks. The business section was half-way down the street, and consisted of a tottery wooden shed labeled "Garage," a small drug store with fly specked windows, and a big, square building with a false front, modern show windows, and a big sign reading:



MUMFORD'S GENERAL STORE

Post Office, East Point, Kentucky.

A bright red gasoline pump stood in front of it, and a rolling oil tank. Four old men were in conversation in front of the store, and there was a group of younger men whose meeting place was evidently the garage. A few wagons were drawn up along the stone sidewalk, the horses tied to hitching posts. Evidently all the available cars had been driven out to the field.

As they drew up in front of the store the fat driver offered to wait and transport Hemingwood back to the field, which offer the Bostonian accepted with thanks.

He went into the crowded little store and looked around at the counters.

"Mumford sells everything from pills to plows," he soliloquized, and then spotted a short, broad, baldheaded man emerging from a cubbyhole in the rear. It proved to be Mumford.

Hemingwood introduced himself, explained his need of a hundred gallons of gas delivered at the field every flying day, and learned that Mumford owned a truck with which it could be delivered. The storekeeper also opined that he could undoubtedly find a place for the flyers to live if they would wait for definite information until the afternoon.

The flyer studied his man a bit, and decided to take him into his confidence to a slight extent. He told him about the casual meeting with his niece that morning, and went on to say: "I came down here with Ballardson. He wanted this gas business, so to keep him from being sore I told him that I had made arrangements in advance with you. I don't know anything about East Point, but I figured it might save unpleasantness. Will you bear me out in my story, if necessary?"

Roundfaced Mr. Mumford chuckled.

"How come you figured Ballardson that way?" he enquired.

"He didn't seem particularly friendly," Hemingwood returned.

"If there's any unpleasantness, probly he'll have something to do with it," stated Mumford. "These mountain people are funny, you know."

On the way back to the field Ballardson's questions and something in the attitude of both men showed plainly that they were not satisfied as to the precise purpose of the pictures Hemingwood was to take. There were fifty or sixty people in plain sight near the ship, and as many more men, women, and children lurking half-screened in the surrounding forest. They watched the transfer of thirty gallons of gas with consuming interest.

Knots of roughly dressed men conversed in low tones, while other more conventionally arrayed, made no mysterious motions. Hemingwood caught a phrase: "The control wires go through the fuselage hyar, and work these hyar elevators." He looked around—he was up on a wing, holding the funnel over the main tank—to find out who knew so much about airplanes in that benighted town. It seemed to be a scrawny, red-headed chap wearing a nondescript felt hat, hickory shirt, and overalls. A moment later Hemingwood noticed Ballardson in conversation with him.

The slow job of straining the gas through the chamois was about over when the flyer heard voices raised in anger. He looked around and saw two men standing close to the tail surfaces of the 'plane, surrounded by a half dozen others, including Ballardson and the airplane expert.

"I say you're a liar!" shouted a gaunt, rawboned mountaineer who was one of the pair. The other, short and powerfully built, retaliated with a resounding slap. The next second they were locked in each other's arms.

Hemingwood leaped to the ground while the onlookers watched breathlessly. Those men were perilously close to the ship. If one of them put a foot through the frail linen of the elevators or rudder—

As he ran toward them, followed by Apperson, he saw the taller man deliberately kick his foot toward the drooping elevators. In a flash Hemingwood took in the details. Their faces were not those of two fighting men temporarily hating each other. And that kick had looked deliberate, even if it had missed. As he got within a foot of them they were poised

directly over the tail assembly, straining mightily. Another second and they would have crashed together over the ship and would have put one De Haviland airplane totally out of flying condition for several days.

It was a frame-up, Hemingwood thought as he hurled himself at the contestants. He hit them like a human cannon ball. And, for the moment, he was one. Characteristically, he was totally unimpressed by the odds against him. With fists and feet he drove the astounded battlers back. After they had recovered, they commenced to retaliate. No one else took a hand, for a moment, and Hemingwood fought entirely alone. He seemed to be a dynamic ball, bristling with feet and fists from every angle. He was in a cold rage at the unwarranted interference of the mountaineers, and he gloried in the opportunity to vent some of it on them. He fought furiously, and for a few seconds actually had the best of it. A sweeping kick sent the stocky man to the ground, and George took a clumsy swing on the side of the head in order to sink his fist in the taller man's belly. That put that personage out for a second or two, so he was able to meet the rising gladiator with a wild flurry of fists that cracked home to the jaw and sent him down again.

But he knew it could not last. He leaped back, and jerked out his Colt.

"Stand still, you!" he snapped, and his glinting eyes were hard and keen and his smile had more than a touch of grimness about it. Subconsciously he noticed Ballardson's amazed, slightly scared face, and the taut expectancy, half fear and half enjoyment, of the spectators. Apperson was at his elbow, his gun also out.

"Listen, all of you!" Hemingwood shouted. There was utter silence. "There's at least one man here that knows airplanes. This framed-up fight was for the purpose of putting this ship out of commission. If



another soul gets anywhere near it he's going to be filled so full of lead it'll take a block and tackle to lift him into the hearse.

"You're fooling with the United States Army if you knock me off. And you won't get away with it. I'm here to take

pictures, and nothing else. I don't give a damn who or what you are, but by God if you two birds or anyone else looks cross-eyed in my direction or starts anything else as funny as this, I'll commence to get damn interested! Now get the hell out of here, you two, and the rest of you get back and stay back!"

Which they did. They were thoroughly awed, and well satisfied to remain at a distance. It was significant that not a soul seemed to take Hemingwood's part. Evidently the mountaineers had the village business men somewhat under their thumbs.

"Nice start I've got," soliloquized the untroubled flyer.

III

HE WASTED no time in taking off —no telling when fleecy cumulous clouds would form in the sky and spoil the continuity of the strips. Apperson had everything in readiness; the camera was set in the floor of the rear cockpit, in which an opening was cut to fit it. The electric motor was connected, and spare batteries and plenty of film for the day's work were in a specially built recess behind the seat.

After a few circles of the field Hemingwood set out for Herkimer, climbing steadily.

In a half hour the altimeter was reading eleven thousand feet, and the long grind began. He was flying his strips over the short ten mile course, east and west.

It was hard work to fly continuously with every faculty concentrated on keeping the ship absolutely level and flying a straight line, making sure that the strips had plenty of overlap and that the speed of the plane was kept constant. In the rear Apperson was devoting all his attention to the huge camera and the motor. The camera was geared to shoot a picture automatically at intervals of a few seconds. When he wanted to reload he signaled Hemingwood, who thereupon flew around, killing time until the change had been made.

Four hours of it left even the nerveless pilot very tired; he was heartily glad when it was time to drop earthward again. They had covered the first six miles of the terrain they were to shoot. He hoped devoutly that there were no gaps to make retakes necessary. No way to tell that, though, until the thousands of pictures had been developed and laboriously put together in the completed mosaic.

Mumford proved he was on the job by

having the next day's supplies delivered at the field within a half hour after they had landed. By the time the big tanks of the D. H. were full, a few spectators had arrived and were looking in awed wonder at the gigantic bomber. Close on their heels came Miss Morgan.

Mumford seemed distraught and ill-at-ease, referring to the fight only slightly. Hemingwood decided that the merchant did not dare take sides openly against the mountaineers and that he was considerably worried because of his business connection with the hated Government man. His niece, however, did not follow his lead. She beckoned Hemingwood to one side, and her eyes were dark with worry.

"Tell me about this morning," she commanded, and Hemingwood obliged, giving a more or less ludicrous account thereof.

"Apperson and I are going to stay out here and guard the crate," he concluded. "I guess they won't monkey with us any more. I notice that the wild eyed mob here are keeping their distance pretty well."

"I wish you wouldn't take it so lightly," she protested. "You have no idea how they are when they're aroused or frightened. With your ship flying around over them all day they'll feel hunted, and——"

"I tried to explain this morning that I'm not interested in their private crimes," Hemingwood told her with a grin.

"I know, but the poor dears have been hunted so much for things like moonshining, which they consider perfectly all right—you know they can't see for the life of them why they should be taxed, or be breaking the law, because they make some corn mash out of their own corn and distill it——"

"I know. But the poor dears give me a pain in the neck when they try to bust up my ship. But let's not worry about it, eh?"

Whereupon, in a very presentable baritone, he burst forth into a song:

"Snap your fingers at care!
Don't cross the bridge 'till you're there
——"

The girl hesitated, smiled, and finally laughed. She became serious again very soon, however.

"That's fine, but please be careful and try not to alienate them any more, won't you?" she begged him.

Hemingwood assented, and he was aware of a curious feeling of warm satisfaction that she took so much interest in the situation. He himself simply couldn't be

worried about it. He was an unusual type. He could not be said to be brave, because he was really unacquainted with fear. It was a strange paradox, that a man who loved living so much should hold life itself so cheaply as did George Arlington Hemingwood, of the Hemingwoods of Boston.

"I'll bring you your supper," she offered.

"I've got to go to town and see if I can rustle some blankets and perhaps a tent from your uncle. He just told me he had some."

The noise of a motor became clear, and George looked up to see the Mumford truck on its way homeward.

"I intended to get a ride back to town, but I see I missed out," Hemingwood observed. Mumford apparently wanted to spend no more time than he needed to in the vicinity of the flyers.

"Don't blame him, please, Lieutenant Hemingwood," the girl said in a low voice. "You have no idea what a difficult position he is in because of the trouble this morning. The mountain people——"

"I understand. There's no reason why he should risk being mixed up in it," nodded Hemingwood.

"I'll give you a lift home on Pegasus," she offered, and so it came about that Hemingwood had a hilarious ride back to East Point on the rear deck of the venerable Pegasus. He got off a little way out of town although the girl did not suggest it.

"I can't call on you tonight, which I intended to ask permission to do," he told her, smiling up into her own mirthful eyes. "You have no idea what an angel from heaven you'd seem if you passed our palatial pasture home this evening, though."

She hesitated a moment, and then laughed.

"I am invited out so little here that I miss no opportunities to take part in the social whirl," she smiled. "Auntie and I will accept with pleasure, and supply a better picnic supper than you can get out of cans, too!"

He got his supplies from Mumford, including the tent, and likewise a letter, addressed in pencil to Lt. Hemingwood in care of Mumford's store. The script was all but illegible. He opened it in Mumford's presence, and read:

Take my advise and git out of town quick or youll be sorry I know what Im talkin about

A friend

Hemingwood's mouth stretched in a wide grin. He thrust it into his pocket and said nothing about it to the patiently curious Mumford. He showed it to Apperson, back at the field, and that wily Scot shook his head.



"'Tis no such a bonny country," he remarked, sucking at his pipe.

"Funny people, wild as March hares,"

assented Hemingwood. "They'll think several times before they really try to harm us, though. The most we've got to look forward to is another attempt to harm the ship, I imagine. Our hides will stay intact except under unusual circumstances. Let's pitch the bungalow so I can catch a nap before dinner arrives."

Which they did. And Hemingwood, entirely unaffected by the note in his pocket, fell asleep immediately. He had much more interesting things to think about than crazy mountaineers. Miss Morgan, for instance.

His awakening was very pleasant, being brought about through the medium of Gail Morgan's far from unmusical voice. He thrust his tousled head through the flaps of the tent and smiled through the fog of heavy slumber.

"I hope I'm awake and that this isn't a dream," he greeted her.

"I brought you large sections of food which may be a little more appetizing than you could have found," she told him, smiling down from her throne on Pegasus. "If urged, I might even toy delicately with some of it myself. My aunt couldn't come."

She wore no hat, and her piquant face was framed in flying brown hair. Hemingwood smiled appreciatively at the picture she presented.

"Where's Apperson?" he inquired.

"Asleep in the ship."

That worthy was awakened for the meal, which did not conclude until after twilight. Gail leaned back against one wheel of the ship in comfort. Hemingwood lay lazily at full length. Apperson went for a walk. He was a tactful man, was the sergeant.

"Your uncle was a bit mysterious about this Ballardson bozo," Hemingwood re-

marked. "There's no love lost between them, is there?"

"Oh, they get along all right," Gail responded carelessly. "Uncle Ed doesn't exactly approve of Ballardson, though?"

"Why not, if I'm not too curious?"

"He's from the mountains, you know, and everybody knows that his garage business doesn't amount to anything. His real occupation is transferring moonshine by truck into various towns—Covington and Cincinnati, principally."

"I see."

It was probably Ballardson who had sent that note, Hemingwood reflected. The garage man did not cotton to the idea of a ship flying above the mountains several hours a day, taking pictures which he would figure might be for the purpose of locating stills. He had taken a chance that the letter would scare the interlopers away. Hemingwood did not anticipate any more extreme measures, when the note failed to work. It had been his experience that the uniform of the United States Army aroused respect enough to make any wearer thereof immune from actual personal violence, under ordinary conditions. He had seen the effect of it on the border and likewise in these same Kentucky mountains. Except under unusual provocation, an army man was much safer than any other stranger could possibly be.

"Has East Point got any minion of the law?" he asked.

"Just Ballardson," returned Gail, with that little chuckle that Hemingwood so enjoyed hearing.



The pilot laughed aloud, and Gail joined him.

"So the prominent bootlegger is peace officer, eh?" chortled Hemingwood. "That's what I call a real tight corporation."

"He's pretty good at the job, aside from the moonshine; too," the girl told him.

The stars winked into being, and before long a thin moon rose above the mountains. They talked casually of many things, with an undercurrent of friendly understanding that seemed like the result of long acquaintance. Hemingwood learned that his estimate of her was correct. She had finished college the year before and was spending a year in East Point because of the ill health of her aunt and likewise because her own rather drawn condition as a result of hectic college years.

"I tried to study all day and dance all

night and it didn't work," she admitted. "But I had a good time! I haven't minded it so much up here, but I'll be glad to get back. Week-ends in Louisville once or twice a month have been about all that kept me from dying of dry rot this winter. Flyers don't drop in every day."

"They don't know you're here," he told her. "After I spread the news they'll be flying in here in coveys."

Apperson came back and disappeared into the tent. Hemingwood was to take the first watch. At nine o'clock Gail got to her feet and announced that she must be going. Hemingwood walked over to the fence with her. Pegasus was tethered there.

As their hands clasped in parting and he looked down into her upturned face he obeyed an irresistible impulse and leaned over to kiss her.

She slipped away, laughing.

"We're getting along wonderfully, but not that well," she chuckled, and swung aboard Pegasus. "Good night. And if you have any more fights I hope you win them!"

He stood and watched her as Pegasus ambled along the moonlit road. Just before they entered the deep shadow of the trees she turned in the saddle and threw him a parting smile and waved. She seemed, at that moment, like some little goddess disappearing from mortal eyes into the impenetrable darkness of the forest.

He walked back to the ship slowly and sat in the cockpit. His Colt was ready to his hand, and the shadowed mountains clustering around him seemed doubly mysterious, even menacing, under the blanket of the night. They seemed to be whispering with all the bloody legends of the mountain country and to be vibrant with some of the passion and untamable wildness of the people whom they sheltered.

And yet George Arlington Hemingwood, a lonely watchman in the midst of all-pervading silence, was thinking, not of what might happen with his enemies, but rather of what the future might hold forth for himself and Gail Morgan.

IV

ACCORDING to instructions, Apperson awakened him at eight o'clock. At nine they had consumed coffee and bread, and were ready to take off.

It was a delicate job on the rolling field, but again it was accomplished safely, and the ship cleared the surrounding trees by a good fifty feet. As it roared out over the

forest Hemingwood held it low, pointing for the little schoolhouse where Gail presided. It was on the outskirts of the mountain settlement called "The Hollows." As he passed over it he jazzed the throttle twice. He saw Gail thrust her head out of a window and wave her handkerchief. He returned the greeting with his free arm. There was a pleasant warmth in his heart as he circled back and left the schoolhouse behind.

The ship was barely three hundred feet high, so he nosed up in a steep climb. His right arm was draped carelessly over the side of the cockpit, and his eyes swept the ground idly.

Suddenly he felt a jerk at his ankle. He dropped his eyes, and in utter surprise saw a clean gash on the inner side of his right booth sole. He moved his foot slightly and saw a hole in the wooden flooring of the cockpit. The next second he saw gas jetting forth from a jagged hole in the small copper tube which was the gasoline feed line between main tank and carburetor. The Liberty's roar died away into sputtering, and then silence. And down below there was nothing but impenetrable forest into which to crash.

Hemingwood reached automatically for the mainline petcock, and turned off the gas. Then he turned on the petcock which released the gas from the emergency tank, holding the ship in a dive to maintain flying speed.

For agonizing seconds the motor did not catch and the ship was diving like a comet for the earth. Hemingwood cursed steadily, fluently. He had been shot at from the ground and, by dumb luck, they had hit the fast moving target. There was nothing for it but to crash. What the hell was the matter with that gravity tank? If he could get his hands on the blankety-blank marksmen!

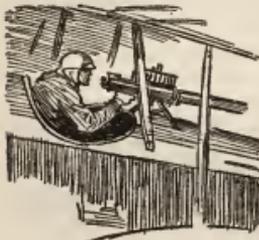
Then he saw them. There were five of them, partially hidden, and they were still shooting. He could see the smoke from their rifles. Unseen and unheard above the whining wires, there were bullets zipping through the air around him.

There was two hundred feet of altitude left. With his usually boyish face suddenly grim and hard, Hemingwood swooped around and made the dive more steep. Might as well use that last little margin to teach *those* birds a lesson!

His finger was on the machine gun control as he pointed the ship at them. And at that second the gravity tank got working and the motor cut in. There was

thirty minutes' gas in that tank, plenty to get back to the field with.

Hemingwood came to himself. Even his unemotional soul revolted at the thought of pouring a hail of death on the five would-be murderers below. But he did dive down at them, carefully aiming a



bit beyond them, and his machine guns spouted fire and a hail of bullets which ripped up the trees a few dozen yards away from them.

He barely brought the quivering, strained ship out of the dive in time to clear the treetops. He turned again, and for the next five minutes terrorized the hiding mountaineers with showers of lead all around them.

"Now let 'em see whether they've got any stomach to keep fiddling around," he grinned, as he swept back toward the field.

His rancor was all gone, now that he was safe. It was something of a game to him.

THEY fixed the mainline by means of a spare rubber connection they had brought along, and got in a good five hours of work, landing shortly after two o'clock. Apperson, seemingly entirely unshaken by the events of the morning, had a suggestion to make. He led Hemingwood to one side, so that Mumford, there with the gas, could not overhear anything, and said:

"Let's dispense with lunch, sir-r-r. This is bonny weather. And it may be the mornin's events'll scare 'em off, or maybe they'll try again. So the queecker we get through the better, to my mind."

To which Hemingwood assented. There were but a few onlookers this time, and seemingly the sound of the shooting had not been noticed. Mumford did not mention anything about the events of the morning, either, so Hemingwood decided that it was a secret between himself and those five men on the ground. Which was just as well, he reflected. He did not particularly care for the news to spread that he had attempted to shoot up five mountaineers.

They worked until after four o'clock, and once again Mumford was waiting with a new supply of gas. He seemed a bit more openly friendly now, and announced

that Mrs. Mumford and Gail would again oblige with supper.

They arrived in due time, along with Pegasus, the buckboard, and a big basket of provender, but left almost immediately after the meal was over. Mrs. Mumford, it appeared, was president of the Mental Improvement Society of East Point, which was to meet that evening to weigh the merits of English poetry from Chaucer to Masefield, and Gail was to sing.

Hemingwood did not mention the incident of the morning to Gail. There was nothing of the grandstander in him and he did not want her to worry about it. After they had gone he and Apperson smoked and talked and watched the moon come up. At ten o'clock Apperson, who was to take the last watch again, was knocking out his pipe preparatory to retiring when Hemingwood became aware of the fact that a horse was undoubtedly galloping toward them, and coming fast. They waited by the fence, hands on their guns.

It was Gail Morgan, and Pegasus was a badly winded steed as she guided him up to the fence.

"Did you shoot anybody this morning?" she asked breathlessly.

Hemingwood, a tingle of excitement running up and down his spine, told her briefly what had happened.

"You hit Jim Calley!" she told him. "He must have been one of those men—they're all Calleys over there. Jim must have been a little away from the others so that you got him. Anyway, the Calleys are coming over tonight to get you!"

"May I ask how you know?" Hemingwood asked easily.

Apperson was listening quietly, his empty pipe upside down in his mouth.

"Mrs. Tuttle, a woman I nursed when she was sick, sent her little boy to tell me. To these people, the fact that you and I have been friendly means that we must be sweethearts, so she wanted to warn me. She isn't a Calley herself, although she's kin to them."

Gail was talking with breathless speed, as though laboring under almost unbearable tension. She went on: "I came right up, without telling a soul. You'd better start for East Point right off."

"No, I guess we'll have to guard the old ship, Gail."

"But you don't know these Calleys! They're bad! What chance will you have against six men? I didn't know what to do. All the men in East Point are either

with them or afraid of them. It would be suicide for anyone like my uncle to take a hand in it, Lieutenant Hemingwood. But



you could come down to East Point for the night, and——”

“No! We'll stay. And there's nothing to worry about,” declared Hemingwood. “Gail, you're a brick. You're a whole mansion of bricks. Now you turn right around and gallop home before you get mixed in it

yourself. I'll thank you later.”

“You can't stay!” she said, the hint of a sob in her voice. “I tell you those Calleys——”

“Please run along, Gail. And I tell you we'll be all right. If I didn't think so, I'd light out. I'm not hankering to commit suicide.”

Finally, after Hemingwood had outlined his plans, she did go, but not before she had exhausted every means of persuasion at her command. Hemingwood had a hard time to keep her from staying nearby to see what happened and then she announced that she'd tell her uncle and that they would both be back, which Hemingwood likewise vetoed.

“Please be careful!” she whispered finally, leaning over a trifle. “And if there's any way you can, will you let me know that everything has come out all right? I couldn't close my eyes until I know——”

“Sure. Now for the love of Mike, pretty lady, beat it!”

She had not disappeared from sight before Hemingwood and Apperson were busy. A big rock, protruding two feet above the ground, was the cornerstone of their defense. The ship was standing by the fence, the tent thirty feet away from it and ten feet from the edge of the forest. The rock was in a corner of the field nearest the road, perhaps forty feet from both tent and ship.

They worked with breathless haste, carrying the fence rails over to the rock and constructing their barricade. In a half hour they had a small, three sided fortification of which the rock formed the apex

facing the tent, where Hemingwood figured most of the action would take place, if any. The machine guns were useless—— there was no time to dismount them.

He was right about the scene of battle. Less than half an hour from the time they had ensconced themselves in their shelter, lying flat on the ground, they heard a rustling in the bushes behind the tent. Although the moonlight was flooding the world in silver radiance, they could see no signs of the men they knew were there.

For taut minutes there was utter silence. Hemingwood wondered whether the low structure of rails and rock behind which they were hidden would catch the marauders' eyes and scare them off. He hoped it would, but the chances were against it.

It was fully ten minutes before six ghostly figures, long rifles in hand, slipped out of the bushes and started to surround the tent. Hemingwood acted before any of them went out of sight behind it.

He shot his Colt in the air, and shouted; “Drop your guns! Hands up!”

“Quick!” bellowed Apperson, to let them know there was more than one gun trained on them.

For an instant six men, vague in the moonlight, stood like statues. Hemingwood shot again, shouting at the same time: “Next shot I'll get someone! Drop those guns!”

The utter surprise of it and the terrifying effect of those two shots from unseen marksmen did the trick. The mountaineers were a bit too far from the shelter of the forest to risk a break for it against unknown odds. Their rifles dropped to the ground and six pairs of hands thrust slowly into the air.



For a moment Hemingwood was up against a problem. He knew in his heart that if those mountaineers had the nerve they could make their escape against two Colts. The darkness and the distance between the opposing factions made accurate shooting almost impossible. The most sensible procedure was for either him or Apperson to go out and make sure they

were thoroughly disarmed, though the presence of one or the other in the vicinity of the six silent Kentuckians meant that the other man could not shoot without risking the wounding or killing of his ally. But it was the only possible chance. And which part should he take? Should he approach them and leave Apperson to cover him, or vice versa? He was a better shot than Apperson—and possibly the Scot might hesitate to shoot.

He put the matter up to the sergeant bluntly. Apperson silently climbed out of the barricade and circled widely to approach the line of captives from the rear. If they were unarmed, except for their rifles on the ground, he and Apperson might get away with it, Hemingwood reflected. Then a thought occurred to him, and he called Apperson back. He heard whispers pass between the mountaineers.

"Keep quiet! No talking!" he called sharply. Then: "If they make a move, drop to the ground so I can shoot!" he told Apperson. "Wait a minute! Get in here! I'm going out there myself!"

Afterward Hemingwood figured that the mountaineers, sure that they were opposed to only two men with revolvers, got the courage from the fact to make a break for liberty. As always among the mountain people, they were undoubtedly desperate at the thought of capture. For, just as Hemingwood was climbing out of the barricade the six men made a concerted leap for their rifles. Like a flash Hemingwood dropped, and both Colts barked in a fusillade of shots. The flyer saw one man drop, and another screamed with pain. A hail of bullets poured from their rifles, and he heard Apperson groan.

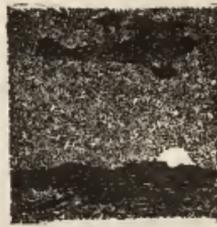
"They got me!" he said weakly.

Hemingwood shoved another clip into his gun and emptied it into the woods wherein the Kentuckians had disappeared. He could hear them running through the undergrowth. When Hemingwood was really mad, it was a sort of cold, calculating fury. That was his condition as he examined Apperson. It was a rather nasty looking wound in the hip, but apparently it was only a deep flesh wound. As he bound it with handkerchief and belt he said tersely: "Think you can move at all?"

Apperson tried, winced, and said: "I could hobble in an emergency, sir-r-r. What's in your mind, may I ask?"

Hemingwood explained quickly. If there was a way to get those men he'd do it, and he did not figure the odds against him.

The self-starter worked the second time he spun the booster magneo. The ship was already in position for the take-off. With utter recklessness he shoved the throttle



full on and the ship hurled itself toward the dense blackness of the trees behind a cold motor. At the last second he zoomed the De Haviland across the menacing wall, and the matchless Liberty

did its work. Half a minute later he had spotted the fugitives below, like ghosts slipping through the shadows.

He gave them one chance. The first burst from his guns was close to them, but not aimed exactly at them. Then he swooped so low he was scraping the tops of the trees, and motioned them back toward the field with his arm. They *must* realize that he held their lives in the palm of his hand!

They did. He saw them ostentatiously drop their guns and, with their hands in the air in token of surrender, start walking back toward the field. Apperson was waiting for them. Hemingwood rode herd on them from the air while he watched the crippled Scotchman supervise while one man tied up his fellows with safety wire from the ship.

They knew that the best they could do would be to kill Apperson—and then all succumb themselves to that withering blast of death from the air.

For the next thirty seconds Hemingwood flew as he never had before. It was a rare feat of airmanship to land his De Haviland in the darkness on that field, but he did it.

He climbed out and looked their captives over. One of them was a gaunt old man, with a gray, tobacco stained beard. Three of them seemed to be middle-aged, and there were two young fellows. One who had fallen seemed little more than a boy. Apperson was binding his wound. The bullet had drilled through his thigh. Another man was wounded in the shoulder. Neither wound was mortal.

Hemingwood was thinking hard as to his next step. Apperson's wound was practically negligible, although he had to hobble on one foot and it drew a sigh from him every time his other foot touched the ground. Keeping those men prisoners meant a good deal of trouble and red tape. Probably the whole clan would descend on

the flyers to revenge themselves if they stayed in the mountains, and very possibly there would be complications of considerable difficulty in even incarcerating them. Besides, his business was to get those pictures.

Apperson was lying on the ground, to relieve his pain. Hemingwood looked down at his captives for a moment in silent appraisal. They darted quick, fearful glances at him, like trapped animals.

"Listen, you Calleys," he said conversationally. "You've tried to kill us twice. Once it was because you were afraid we were after you. That shows you're up to something. I could have killed you all then; I wounded one of you by accident, in trying to scare you. Then you pull this. I could have killed you all again. You know that.

"Now get this. I don't give a damn about you. I'm here to take pictures. I don't want trouble. I don't care whether you're making moonshine enough to float the British Navy. I've got you now. To show you that I don't want to bother with you, I'm going to let you take your wounded and vamoose out of here. Go home, lay off me, and behave yourselves. We've sniped three of you in exchange for one little wound, and by God, if you lift a finger at me again I'll mow you all down! Get anywhere near this field and those machine guns'll start working from the ground." They wouldn't know that the guns on the ship were useless on the ground unless dismounted. "And get funny while I'm in the air and the same

thing'll happen. And if you snipe me off some night while I'm here, you'll have enough of the United States Army combing these woods for you to run you down like rats. All the dope will be mailed in tomorrow, including who you are and what you've done. Now I'm going



to spank you and send you home like the bad boys you are!"

A long sigh came from the astounded prisoners, followed by a deep chuckle from the old man. Apperson showed no sur-

prise. Hemingwood released them, and they got to their feet slowly. The old man smiled slowly, and it made a great change in his fierce, hawk-like face.

"Yuh can think o' the Calleys as yore friends, stranger," he said slowly. "C'mon hyar, you!"

Carrying their wounded, they marched silently off into the forest.

V.

LESS than five minutes after the Calleys had disappeared into the woods the clatter of an approaching automobile interrupted the reminiscent conversation of the two airmen.

It was the Mumford truck, and it carried Mumford, Gail Morgan, and five other men. One of them, he perceived, was Ballardson. Another was a doctor, who got to work on Apperson immediately.

"Gail told me all about it, Lieutenant," said Mumford. "Of course we couldn't let a thing like this go on——"

"Of course not!" interrupted Ballardson. The fat peace officer was ill at ease, and showed it. "I'm glad there wasn't nothin' to it."

"There was something to it, but it ended all right," Hemingwood told him, and a perverse imp in his eyes was unseen in the darkness. He narrated the night's events briefly, and then added: "I'm sure grateful to you for sending me that note of warning!"

He was watching closely, and knew he had scored. Ballardson's mouth opened and closed in fish-like gasps. Hemingwood turned to the other men, who were suddenly interested.

"Got an anonymous note, warning me to get out of town for safety's sake. Just found out it was from Ballardson here. Thanks again, Officer."

The men were silent, as though at a complete loss for words. Hemingwood knew, however, that he had put a weapon in their hands which would save both them and him any reprisal from the crooked official for the night's work. He was aware of how slight an excuse was needed for a mountain feud, and surmised that Mumford and the other East Point men had made a real sacrifice in coming to his assistance.

The men drifted over to the ship to examine it at close range. Hemingwood gave Mumford succinct details about the note and the successful shot he had fired at Ballardson a moment before, and then

joined Gail, who had been standing quietly in the background.

"Gail, we never can thank you enough, of course," he said.

"Don't try, then. I'll take it for granted," she laughed back.

She was elusively lovely in the moonlight, and Hemingwood found himself in the grip of profoundly disturbing emotions.

"Ever since I arrived you've been doing favors for me," he found himself saying. And then to his own surprise, he added: "I wish you'd do me one more favor, and marry me!"

For a second her glorious eyes met his own squarely. Then she turned away quickly, and laughed.

"It might not be a favor!" she said lightly, and slipped away toward her uncle.

The truck carried Apperson back to town, but Hemingwood stayed out at the field. He did not sleep well, either. Hour after hour he examined himself, mentally, and in the end he decided that he was afraid he was in love.

The succeeding week only made him surer of it. While Apperson was convalescing he spent every possible hour with Gail, but never was the subject closest to his heart mentioned. George Arlington Hemingwood, who had never known what it was to be shy or at a loss, was totally unable to nerve himself for the ordeal of a serious proposal. Night after night he tried, only to stutter off into banal nothings.

That is, until the morning when, Apperson being recovered and the pictures all taken, they were about to take off for home. With a crowd around to watch the take-off, his helmet and goggles on his head and the motor idling along on the warm-up under Apperson's skillful hand, he impulsively bent over and whispered his plea into her ear. She listened quietly, her hand clasped in his. They were in back of the crowd and for the moment seemed to be inhabiting a little world all their own.

"Can't you possibly say 'yes?'" he asked her, his eyes holding hers steadily.

"I'm sorry—but I don't quite know yet," she whispered. "I like you better than any man I've ever known." She hesitated, and then leaned close to him and said rapidly, "I think I want to say yes—but

George, I'm not sure! Perhaps this summer——"

He pressed her eagerly for a definite answer, but she shook her head. Even so, there was a song on his lips and such a leaping light in his eyes as he got in the ship that Apperson took one look at him, glanced at the flushed face of the girl, and smiled an enigmatic smile below his owl-like goggles.

Hemingwood took off, circled the field, and then obeyed an impulse to give the crowd a parting thrill. He swooped down low over the field and waved a farewell. In the forefront of the crowd he saw Gail, and she was beckoning wildly. For a moment he stared. She was signaling him down!

He landed, taxied the ship to the edge of the field, and turned it around. She appeared alongside the 'plane, her hair whipping in the propellor blast and her eyes glowing warmly. The astonished crowd looked on, wondering, as she put her lips close to his ear and said quickly:

"When I saw you leaving I found out that I was sure! Will you be back this week-end?"

George Arlington Hemingwood yelled like a Comanche Indian, and started to climb out.

"Not now—no!"

"All right! Tell all the folks, and I'll be here Saturday if I have to build a ship!"

Thuswise she sent him away.



NOT until Goddard Field was in sight did George Arlington Hemingwood, of the Hemingwoods of Boston, come out of his rose tinted trance. His face was one wide grin as he sent the ton-and-a-half bomber roaring downward in sweeping spirals and graceful wing-turns.

"Just before I left I seem to remember some remarks about love and matrimony!" he reflected. "I'll have to tell these rough-necks some time, I suppose. Won't that boy Snapper rave! And won't I get the razz!"

He did. It continued spasmodically long after the quarters of Mr. and Mrs. Hemingwood became a popular gathering place, but Hemingwood bore up under it wonderfully.



UNCLE BILLY WATSON'S JOB

By OWEN CLARKE TRELEAVEN

Author of "The Fool Prospector's New Suit," "The Law of the Shark Gods," etc.

UNCLE BILLY WAS A GUN CRANK; HE KNEW IT; HE GLORIED IN IT. OTHERS
 ..MADE FUN OF THE OLD-TIMER AND HIS OLD-TIME GUNS. THEN CAME
 THE TEST WITH UNCLE BILLY'S LAST JOB AS GUARD FOR HIGH GRADE ORE

NEITHER man could have explained why they did not begin shooting the instant they caught sight of each other, as they had so often threatened to do. Perhaps it was the surprise of meeting thus unexpectedly after a lapse of twenty years that caused the momentary hesitation as they met in the road—and that hesitation tided them over the ticklish second when their right hands trembled with nerve tension. Unafraid, each man looked coolly into the other's eyes.

Then Uncle Billy Watson frowned and laid the old fashioned Colt's gun, which he had been fondly examining, down beside him on the seat of the two wheeled cart. He laid it down reluctantly, with loving care, and his horny hand seemed to caress the polished pistol grip—for Uncle Billy was what the East would have termed an antique firearm collector, but what the West laconically dubbed a gun crank.

His brows drew together as he laid down the antique pistol and he abruptly turned his horse's head to pass the approaching rider. But the equestrian pulled up his handsome black gelding squarely in the middle of the road and sat awaiting Uncle Billy's first move; his hand significantly rested on his right thigh and there was a sneer upon his swarthy face.

Uncle Billy's calm was phlegmatic. "Hort, Lakey," he began in cold, measured accents, "I swore I'd shoot ye the next time I laid eyes on you. But now—I dunno. I'm considerable older'n I was when we parted and mebber I got more sense now. I didn't have much then or I'd never have hooked up with you—that's dead certain. But now I dunno as I care to risk swinging for killing you where you sit. It wouldn't be much of a trick for me to do. But it would be a risk when I can't prove you burned our cabin with all my antique guns twenty years ago, an' I can't prove that ye stole them coffee cans that held my share of the dust and nuggets. I can't prove nothin' and I'm too smart for ye. I can see the fever to draw in your eye, Hort Lakey, so pull over to the side of the road and let me by. I'd

be ashamed t' death to have anybody come along and see me talkin' to ye."

The sneer on the dark face of the man on the horse broadened.

"One excuse is as good's another. The truth probably is, you're too old to work that fast draw of



yours any more. And I'll bet you ain't got a gun with you that was made later than '57, so you couldn't do any shootin' if you was itching to. Especially if you ever got that Colt's Brevet you was always belly-aching for—"

Uncle Billy lovingly picked up the long barrelled gun from the seat.

"I got that Brevet here," he interrupted. "After twenty years search, I found her today. And she's in first rate workin' order, don't you worry about that. But I tell you, Hort Lakey, I ain't going to use it on ye. You ain't worth the risk I'd be takin'. Get out of my way, I'm going home."

Lakey laughed tantalizingly.

"So you can't be prodded into fighting? All right. Guess, then, I'd better give you the message I was sent to deliver. Ed Summers wants you should go up to the Golden Horn to see him. He's got a job for you. One of them guard jobs like you had with the Express Company. A dangerous job like you always said you craved." He laughed at his own words. "And don't forget if you get the job, that I recommended you for it. Don't forget that!"

He wheeled his horse and spurred it into a gallop in the direction from which he had come. His arrogant laugh floated back to Uncle Billy, who sat fondly handling the antique pistol.

LAKEY proceeded at a fast pace up the road until he had put a mile between him and Uncle Billy Watson. Then he stopped his horse and looked back. Uncle Billy was not in sight. Lakey abruptly left the road and crossed the creek below a dam which was used to divert part of the stream into a ditch that followed the hills around to Ross's reservoir.

He crossed the stream and went up a draw on the other side. At some little distance from the creek he dismounted and tied his horse to a small digger pine. He continued on foot until he came within sight of a large boulder. Here he stopped and whistled softly.

Instantly a long barrelled pistol appeared from behind the rock to be followed by a man's head. Lakey called reassuringly and went to the hidden man.

"It's all fixed, Lew," he chuckled. "I just met the old coot down the road a piece and he's going to see Ed Summers about the job. Ain't that rich? Him with his old fashioned pistol aguardin' all that gold! And tickled as a kid, he is, be-

cause at last somebody wants to hire him. If he only knew that tomorrow's the last time he'll ever see the sunrise—haw, haw! Shoot his mouth off about me stealing his gold and burning up his crazy old guns, will he? Run me out of the best mining country I ever saw with his threats to shoot me, huh? Well I went, all right, but it's my turn now. I been figgering for years on how to get him, and I got my chance at last! Him and the gold will be got tomorrow, Lew ol' timer—we'll kill two birds with the same stone."

For a long time they squatted there on their heels, cowpuncher fationed, and planned the events of the morrow.

II

UNCLE BILLY sat a few minutes longer where Lakey had left him. He experienced several emotions. His first impulse was to fling his old battered hat into the air in wild, hilarious jubilation over the fact that a job had been offered him.

For the last few years Uncle Billy had found it more and more difficult to get work. No one wanted an old man, it seemed. Lumbago made it almost impossible for him to get out and prospect for himself. So he had been forced to content himself with odd jobs now and then which paid little money. Of late a hideous worry had come to haunt his nights. He was afraid that he would have to spend his last few years in the alms house, subject of charity and object of pity. That would have quite broken Uncle Billy's heart.

And now he had actually been offered a job! He chuckled and grinned to himself as he drove along.

Then he was bewildered at Lakey's last words. What had Lakey to do with the Golden Horn mine? And why had he recommended him for the job? He wondered—

Uncle Billy realized now, on second thought, that he had detected an innuendo in Lakey's last words at the time of utterance; had sensed an underlying connotation in that last sentence, had sensed something that inexplicably foreboded evil for himself. "A dangerous job," Lakey had said. And had recommended him!

Uncle Billy grinned and there was a little devil-may-care gleam in his steady blue eyes as he picked up the reins and clucked to his ancient horse and started toward Murphys. He's see Ed Summers about

that job, right pronto. A dangerous job and Hort Lakey had recommended him for it—H-m-m-mm.

Twenty years ago Uncle Billy and Lakey had been partners in a claim over in Columbia. They had prospered steadily and had got along well together as long as they made wages. But from the day when they made the first big cleanup their relations had undergone a change.

Lakey had seemed to take every opportunity to quarrel and bring about a dissolution of their partnership. He had become surly and suspicious. Gold does that to some men. His method of provoking a quarrel had been invariably the same; he had continually ridiculed Uncle Billy Watson's hobby of collecting antique firearms. Particularly he had made light of the older man's great desire for a Colt's Brevet—a gun believed to have been made in Belgium under Colt's patents and which was difficult to obtain. In time the bone of contention between the two had come to be that Brevet gun. At the very mention of the pistol Lakey would fly into a rage and accuse his partner of slighting the work at the mine to further a crazy hobby. At times he had deliberately baited Watson into anger by insulting remarks about the hobby and particularly the Colt's Brevet.

Then, on the night of the big fire which wiped out nearly all the town, their relations had come to the breaking point. Their own cabin stood well aside from the path the devastating flames had taken, but after the business section of the town had burned to the ground, Uncle Billy had seen that

his own cabin was beginning to blaze and arrived at the scene just in time to see someone making off through the brush back of the claim.

The cabin was doomed. It had almost broken Uncle Billy's heart to stand helplessly by, watching the



greedy flames consume his beloved collection of antique firearms, which had by this time assumed respectable proportions and value. The fact that his coffee cans filled with gold hidden under the floor might not be there, melted into chunks of blackened metal, when the fire had burned out, did not occur to him.

He had stood guard over the smoking embers that night and wondered at the absence of his partner. Probably drunk, with the others who had assisted their fa-

vorite saloon-keepers to save some of the liquid stock, he thought.

But in the morning, after he had searched in vain for the melted chunks of gold and Lakey was still missing—he had known. Others, learning of the loss, had argued the possibility of Lakey's death in the fire, but Uncle Billy had known better. The loss of the guns and the gold as a motive for the burning of the cabin had been all too apparently the reason for Lakey's absence.

As the years passed there came reports from Lakey. Uncle Billy made his threats as to what would happen if the two ever met, and Lakey countered with his boasts as was the custom of the period when two men went gunning for each other. But from that day of the fire until this, they had not met. And now, after twenty years, they encountered each other on the day when Uncle Billy had acquired the pistol which had been the cause of the trouble between them.

Uncle Billy turned off the main street in Murphys at Morley's Garage and went out the Cave Road. Two hours later he arrived at the Golden Mine, and went up to the unpainted shack which served as an office building. He noted with surprise the several tents pitched on the slope of the hill below the shaft of the mine. Must be putting on more men, he thought; the few cabins above the office had sufficed to house the small gang of miners who had worked here. Laboriously Uncle Billy climbed the slope to the office. His back bothered him and he hoped the job he was to contract for would not be hard work.

Ed Summers appeared on the porch of the office building.

"Come right on in, Uncle Billy," he boomed. Summers was a large man, big and hearty in all his actions and he always shouted. There was something likeable in his bluff ways; you felt he was a man to be trusted. "Come on in," he repeated. "Been expecting you for an hour now."

Uncle Billy took off his battered hat as he entered the office. He did it rather hesitatingly.

"None of that now," Summers roared. "None of that. You're here to be hired, not apprenticed. Jus' you keep that there hat on your head—you look too darn naked with it off," he laughed.

"You've asked me for a job two-three times now, Uncle Billy, and I declare I always hated to have to say I couldn't use you. But just here the other day a job—a sort o' peculiar kind of job, you might

say—come up and I says to myself, 'That's the job for him.'"

He laughed again as if to relieve Uncle Billy of any embarrassment he might feel at applying again for work. Then the big man's face grew serious and he lowered his voice until it merely rumbled in a throaty undertone.

"Fact of the matter is, ol' timer, this job is jus' the result of a peculiar hunch I've got. Here's the how of it.

"The Golden Horn's struck something rich. Day before yesterday we busted into something that took my breath away. We're in rock that's goin' better than four hundred dollars a pound!" He leaned back and beamed largely upon Uncle Billy.

"It may be only a pocket, and it may be the biggest thing this country's known since the old days—I don't know. But it means we're able to send twice as much ore down to the smelter because, don't you see, it's so all-fired rich it don't have to be stamped here. Now you know we only got one truck, an' it's been hauling capacity loads down to Angels Camp; one load a day. That's all one truck can do.

"Now if this is only a pocket, it won't pay to buy another truck. So I made arrangements with Ol' Man Ryan to help freight the ore down to the railroad at Angels; he's got that big string of jacks doin' nothing but running wild over the hills. Blondy's going to make two trips a day in the truck down to where the Six Mile Road makes the big bend at that Garland ranch gate.

"Well, Blondy's goin' to dump the stuff there and Ryan's to take it on in the rest of the way. He can go through the Garland ranch and over the hills by George Taylor's property and save quite a little 'hat way; come out on the Angels road at the concrete bridge, you know.

"Well, that part of it's all right. But after I made the arrangements I begun to worry about leavin' all that ore laying there for Ryan's second trip. 'Course I don't suppose anybody'd bother it; these ain't the old wild and woolly days, but somehow I can't help thinking that it'd be a whole lot better if I had somebody, someone I can trust, down there to sort o' keep an eye on those sacks of ore.

"That's the hunch I had. And that's the job I have for you. They tell me you were a shotgun messenger once upon a time, and that you still have the old eye and a darn handy way of pulling a gun."

"Tell me," Uncle Billy had a sudden thought. "Tell me who I take orders from

if I take this job. Does this here skunk, Hort Lakey, have anything to do with me?"

"Oh, that's right. You did have some trouble with Lakey once, didn't you? I'd forgot that. No, you won't have to take orders from anybody but me.

"Fact of the matter is, I don't think anybody around here will have to take orders from Lakey much longer. I don't like the way he does business. I hired him for my assistant two-three weeks ago on very good recommendation from a mine up in Trinity County. And I'm getting sick of him already. So don't let that worry you.

"Well, what do you say, ol' timer? I'll pay seven dollars a day and furnish you with a gun to sort o' have handy in case anything did happen." He got up and went to a drawer in his desk from which



he took a large automatic pistol.

"'Course I don't believe they's any danger of anything happening, but it's always best to be on the safe side." He proffered the gun.

Uncle Billy smiled.

"No, thank you kindly, Mr. Summers. I wouldn't care for that there thing. I never shot one of 'em and never want to. I got a dandy gun of my own I'll load up and carry along. Why, yes, I'll take the job and be obliged to you. How long do ye reckon it will last?" He dropped his eyes as he asked the question, and then raised them to look anxiously out of the window, trying to appear casual and unconcerned.

The big man cleared his throat.

"Well, I can't say rightly. Might be a few days, might be longer. You see if this vein keeps on just the same, I'll buy one or more trucks. It wouldn't pay to keep hiring Ol' Man Ryan's jacks. If it peters out, well, we'll go back to making the one haul a day down to Angels, that's all. Anyway," he beamed and laid a hand on Uncle Billy's shoulder, "I'll hire you right now for a week."

III

UNCLE BILLY'S heart was heavy as he went down the slope to his old horse and dilapidated two wheeled cart. Only a week's work and he had

come up here buoyed with the hope that he would find steady employment! Before he reached the town, however, a thought struck him that made him feel better. Of all the men in and around Murphys, he had been the one chosen to guard the gold! Uncle Billy had always been very proud of his position with the Express Company, in the dangerous days when large shipments of bullion were carried out of the hills. Sometimes the carrying of the gold out of the hills was interrupted and others assumed the conveyance of the precious metal. There had been two such occasions in Uncle Billy's life, and each time he had saved the shipment for the Company. He still carried a slug of lead somewhere under his left shoulder blade. Sometimes he wondered if that had anything to do with the lumbago.

By the time he had reached his shack on the willow lined bank of the creek back of the Mitchler Hotel, he felt better. He was humming a little tune as he lovingly examined and fondled the Brevet pistol he had wanted so long, and his thoughts went back to the days when the percussion cap guns had delt quick death to those who attempted to take the bullion away from the Company—and him.

Uncle Billy put his horse away and wheeled the old cart under the shed. As he came up to the cabin door an old gray cat, sleek and well fed, luxuriantly stretched itself on the doorstep and lazily came to him, its tail big and stiffly erect, and rubbed against his boots, purring fiercely. Uncle Billy shifted the Brevet pistol to his left hand and stooped over to rub the cat's back.

He was preparing his frugal supper when a step sounded at the open door. The crickets and frogs, down beneath the willows back of the cabin, abruptly stilled their twilight singing as the steps came near and Uncle Billy's brows swung sharply together as he saw who his visitor was. He stepped quickly to the door as if to deny the man entrance, and stood silently watchful and frankly frowning, waiting for him to speak.

Horton Lakey smiled ingratiatingly and stepped forward as if to enter the cabin. Uncle Billy stood firm in the doorway.

"Oh well, if you ain't goin' to be hospitable to an old pardner, all right. I just happened to be uptown, waiting for Tibo to bring the mail, and I thought I'd step down here for a minute or two. I wanted to find out if you got the job?"

"I did. And I dunno as your recom-

mendation had so much to do with it after all." Uncle Billy straightened his bent shoulders proudly. "Mebbe Ed Summers knew I was a good man for the job without your say-so. Why are you so anxious to know? Did ye figger on me giving you a rake-off on the first day's pay?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that." Lakey's eyes, half concealed under their suddenly dropped lids, glittered in the glare of the lamplight within the cabin, and he wet his lips with a quick tongue. "I was just interested, bein' as I'm assistant superintendent up to the mine. Thought I'd find out if the boss hired the right man for the job."

"Well, mebbe he did," Uncle Billy snapped. He was tired of this man's arrogance. "If they's nothin' else you wanted to know, Hort Lakey—"

"That's all." Lakey turned to go. "I suppose the super don't take much stock in your moss-covered guns and gave you his automatic to carry tomorrow?" His eyes were bright and steadily fixed on the older man's face, and he eagerly awaited the answer.

"I don't care how many automatics he's got. I don't want any of 'em," Uncle Billy snapped. "I'm going to load one of these here real guns of mine with extr'y heavy charges of powder and ball and I reckon it will stand by me in case of any trouble."

Uncle Billy went back to his preparations



for supper in high dudgeon. "Moss-covered guns!" It was sacrilege! His bright blue eyes raised to the imposing array of pistols attached to the farther wall of the room and he snorted angrily. Auto-

matics, huh! Automatics, hell! Catch him carrying one of them new-fangled things and mebbe forgetting to slip off the safety catch to 'em before he fired—if he had to fire.

He carried a battered frying-pan of smoking bacon and a plate of chili beans to the pine table, took the blackened coffee pot off the stove and set it in front of his plate and sat down to his meal. Abruptly he got up again and brought the newly acquired treasure, the Brevet pistol, to the

table and laid it beside his plate. From time to time he studied it as a book-worm will read his book during a meal; studied it, picked it up and examined it with the all absorbed interest of a connoisseur and collector.

He spent the evening with his treasures as usual, and when he was ready for bed, he loaded one of the old pistols and slid it into a worn old holster that was polished and shining from much contact with smooth metal, and scarred on the outside from rough usage.

He was up when the first rosy streaks of dawn appeared over the mountain above the power house on the Big Tree Road. He hummed happily while he cooked breakfast, and the old gray cat purred as if it, too, knew that the day was auspicious. Uncle Billy was happier than he had been for years. He had a job!

To be sure Ed Summers had said it was only a short time job, but who could tell? Suppose some crazy half-breed Indian got his skin full of jackass and decided to try and steal some of that all-fired rich ore? Suppose somebody tried to stop Ol' Man Ryan, and he should holler for help and he, Uncle Billy, should come a runnin' and with his heavily loaded pistol defend the Company's ore, as he had defended the Express Company's consignments? Why—why, wouldn't it stand to reason Ed Summers would be grateful and give him a lifelong job with the company? Why sure he would!

He'd say, "Uncle Billy, words can not describe my everlasting gratitude to you. There is nothing I will not do for you. I—"

"Doggone me," Uncle Billy shamefully confided to the big gray cat, "I'm getting as silly as a hoot owl. Goin' to play actin' about a durned ornery job standing guard over some gold, like I'd never had any experience at all. They couldn't be no such luck as anything happenin' to make a heero outa me, and if they did, ain't I found out from experience that when a company hires a guard they figger anything that happens while he's workin' as being simply within his duty? Shucks, cat, I'm getting old; that's all's the matter with me, gettin' old and mebbe childish."

Nevertheless he laughed gleefully at the thought. Childish? He knew he was not. He felt better and stronger this morning than he had for years. The keen tang of the morning air and the zest of his new job made him feel positively young again. With happy ostentation he buckled on the

heavy old pistol he had selected and loaded last night, and went out to hitch up the old horse for the ride over to the cache on the Six Mile Road.

IV

HORTON LAKEY, according to previous arrangement, met the man he had talked to in the draw yesterday, and whom he had called Lew, in an abandoned cabin several miles from the scene of Uncle Billy's lonely vigil with the sacks of ore. There was a full hour before the truck would arrive with its precious load, he knew, and he tethered his black gelding outside the cabin and the two men sat smoking for a while, each busy with his thoughts and each a little nervous.

"Did you loose Ryan's jacks?" Lakey queried after a while.

"Cut their hobbles." Lew Draper answered.

"I could see they'd been used to runnin' wild just as you said they had, for they took out for the hills the minute I turned 'em loose. I figger it will take Ol' Man Ryan the better part of the day to round them up. That's what you said you wanted."

"That's the dope. The truck will get to the cache with the first load along about eleven o'clock. It will be way past noon at the earliest before Ryan gets them jacks caught and gets started after his first load. He won't get to the cache until Blondy gets there with the second load. We'll see to that if we have to shoot him. We got to do our work between the time the truck gets there with the second load and Ryan's appearance. It's too bad we can't work this somehow to get more than today's haul, but I guess it can't be done. After today, when they find that crazy old gun crank's body, there'll be a posse out that'll string from hell to breakfast.

"You're sure you got enough mules to pack all the sacks over to your mine, Lew?"

"Sure thing, and I got enough ore on the dump to mix this Golden Horn stuff into. Then, when I *strike my pocket*, all I gotta do is sack up the mixed stuff and send her down below."

"All right. That's that. We'll have our lunch and get started over there. But mind, I want you to remember one thing: Uncle Billy Watson, the old fool, is my meat. If I ketch you taking a bead on him when we're drawing his fire, I'll kill you where you lay."

"Aw, that's all right. Yuh don't need to

get hard boiled about it. You can play out your own feud with the ol' coot; it ain't none of my game. How you figgering on getting him to fire all six shots before we show ourselves?"

"Easy. Play the old trick of the hat behind the boulder. He'll bite all right. Then when his old gun is empty, we'll walk up on him. He can't reload in less than five minutes. And when we step out in plain sight—" Lakey



drew a long, sibilant breath between his teeth and his mouth tightened in to sinister smile of grim satisfaction—"I'm going to talk to him a little while. I want him to know I'm going to kill him. Want him to have a minute or two to think it over while I tell him a few things. And then, when he's listened to me long enough, I'm going to raise this automatic of mine—goin' to bring it up nice and slow, so he can watch it come on a line with his head—and then I'll drill him right between his eyes."

V

UNCLE BILLY arrived at the designated spot for the transfer of the ore sacks, tethered his old horse on a long picket rope and prepared to take things easy. He took a sack filled with hay from the cart and propped it against an oak tree. It would make a comfortable seat while he awaited the arrival of the truck and Ryan's appearance. The sun was warm and the old man sighed and stretched on his sack beneath the tree. The warm air felt good on his back, especially to that stiff area where a bandit's leaden slug remained a constant reminder of the old days when a guarding job meant occasional trouble.

He smiled to himself as he thought of the almost ludicrous contrast; the last job he had had as a guard and this one. Pretty good joke, he thought, to be out here almost within sound of tourists' automobile horns, armed with an old-fashioned pistol against the probable theft of ore sacks. Probable? He smiled broadly. As if anyone would try to do a thing like that in this day and age! It was funny all right. He drew a much thumbed catalogue of antique guns from his sagging coat and de-

lightedly fell to perusing the beloved pages. He grinned with conscious pride of possession when he came to a cut of one of those Brevet pistols; one of the most difficult of old guns to obtain. Well, he had his. Funny how a man could spend twenty years searching for a thing, all over the West, and then come to find it in a neighboring town. Like his quest for one of Patterson Colt's, the one without a trigger guard and with a folding trigger. He'd looked all over for one, and at last had to pay two hundred and fifty dollars for this one.

Two hundred fifty dollars! The guilty thought came to him that he could sell that very gun right now for more than that; they were very rare. That money would go a long way toward keeping him independent. But even as he thought of it, he was horrified. Sell that little beauty? Never. It would be like parting with his own flesh and blood.

Then the first truckload of ore sacks came to break his reverie, and he helped the driver stack them in a neat pile. The truck returned to the mine and Uncle Billy ate his meager lunch; sandwiches of bacon and biscuits and a bottle of cold, black coffee.

Three o'clock came, and Ryan had not shown up. Then Uncle Billy heard the exhaust of the truck and it soon put in an appearance.

"For the love of Mike, Blondy, what do you reckon's happened to Ol' Man Ryan? If he don't get here for his first load pretty quick, I'll have to put in half the night waiting for him to come for the rest."

"Guess his jacks got loose during the night. I see him from the top of the last hill driving them toward the trail. He'll be along pretty quick now. I'd stay and help you pack, but I gotta get right back. The boss, he wants me to help repair the hoist. That's why I made it here with the second load so speedy. Ain't had a bite to eat yet. Ed wants to get the hoist fixed before the night shift goes on at six. Well, so long."

Uncle Billy was worried. He didn't like to have anything go wrong about this job. It didn't augur well. What if Ryan had to make the second trip across the hills to Angels in the dark? Anything might happen. He didn't like it. It made him nervous, and he fell to watching sharply.

Then it was he heard a slight crackle as if someone had broken a dry branch underfoot. He turned quickly to face the di-

rection from which the sound came. Instantly another noise sounded from behind him.

"Who's there?" he called sharply.

There was no answer. Another sound behind him caused him to whirl.

"If anybody's there, speak up or come out where I can see ye," he called quickly. There was no answer, and he turned his head to watch in the direction from which the other noise had come. Then he drew the old-fashioned Colt's gun and raised the hammer.

He had seen the tip of a black hat rise and then lower behind a boulder.

"If ye don't come out in sight before I count three, I'll fire on ye," he threatened.

There was no sound. He turned again and saw the top of another hat appear. Instantly he fired, the heavy charge causing the gun to kick sharply upward. The hat disappeared and for a few moments there was no move around him.

Then the thing happened again, and he fired two shots. The fourth shot was delivered with oldtime cunning. Uncle Billy saw that a small boulder lay behind the rock which concealed the wearer of one of the black hats; behind it and a little to one side. He fired directly at the small boulder



and a fierce grunt of pain told him of some sort of a hit—likely some lead or a fragment of rock, he thought.

The other hat now came into view and before it disappeared Uncle Billy fired again. Again he fired another shot at the smaller rock.

Hardly had the reverberations of the sixth shot echoed and died when two men arose from their concealment and walked toward Uncle Billy. The foremost one was Horton Lakey, and his face was contracted into a hideous expression of rage and pain. A dark stain was spreading on his light colored shirt at his left shoulder. The two men walked toward the guard, and neither one made a move to draw the pistols which hung at their hips.

Uncle Billy still held his gun before him, the barrel slightly pointed upward, his thumb hooked over the high hammer as if he would fire again.

Lakey stepped forward and halted, a

dozen paces from the old man, wincing with the pain of his wounded shoulder.

"You c'n get a little satisfaction outa the knowledge that you shot me before you died, Watson." His voice changed and he grinned, a toothy grin like the grimace of a huge ape. "You know you're going to die, don't you—you old fool!"

Uncle Billy's eyes were peculiar to behold. There wasn't a vestige of fear in their calm blue depths. It was almost as if he welcomed what was to come. Even, it seemed, he was eager for it to begin. He calmly looked from Lakey's snarling face to Lew Draper's eager one. If ever he had looked upon the lust to kill he was looking upon it now. He still held the heavy Colt's revolver before him as if he were not aware he had fired its sixth shot.

"Course I know what's in your mind, Hort Lakey," he said slowly. "You're aiming to shoot me, just as you threatened to do twenty years ago, and just as I threatened to shoot you."

"You pretty near got human intelligence," Lakey sneered. "I could have shot you an hour ago, before the second truck came. But I didn't want to do it from cover. I wanted to wait until you'd had a chance to show what your damn ol' guns can do for you in a tight pinch.

"And, too, I wanted you to know what I'm aiming to do beside killing you. I wanted you to know that you couldn't hold down your last job. I wanted Ed Summers to know he'd picked the wrong man. I'm going to take these here sacks and pack them on some mules Lew's got over the hill a piece. Goin' to take them away and leave your worthless old carcass here to tell the story of your failure."

"Hort Lakey," Uncle Billy was stern, "I'm goin' to give you and Lew Draper one chance. You clear out of here, both of you. Get going and keep going—clear out of the country. If you do that—"

"Haw, haw!" The two men laughed uproariously.

"Are you goin'?"

For answer they laughed again.

"All right! You're asking for it!"

As fast as the movement of the hand of a magician, Uncle Billy raised the Colt's gun he still held before him. There was a flash and a roar, and Lakey spun half-way around and fell on his face. Another roar, and still another, and as Lew Draper was reaching for his own gun, he too, spun, first one way and then the other and slumped into a heap on the ground. They lay where they fell, silent, motionless,

crumpled into awkward postures. Uncle Billy stood perfectly still.

The *tap-tap-tap* of a woodpecker's bill on dead wood sounded from nearby. A meadow lark sang throatily. The *chang, chang* of a brass cowbell sounded from a distant pasture in the Garland ranch.

Then the splutter of a flivver. Ed Summers came running toward Uncle Billy who stood blowing the smoke from his gun barrel.

"What—? Why—?"

Uncle Billy grinned happily.

"Little fuss," he said simply. "These here hombres thought they knew a way to get away with your gold, Mr. Summers. This one," he pointed toward Lakey, "he always did think he knew how to do everything. Always thought he knew more than me, he did. Didn't know much about old guns, though. Didn't know a Colt's Brevet was made with ten chambers as

well as six and eight!" He held the gun forward and beamed upon Ed Summers.

The big man looked at the gun and gasped.

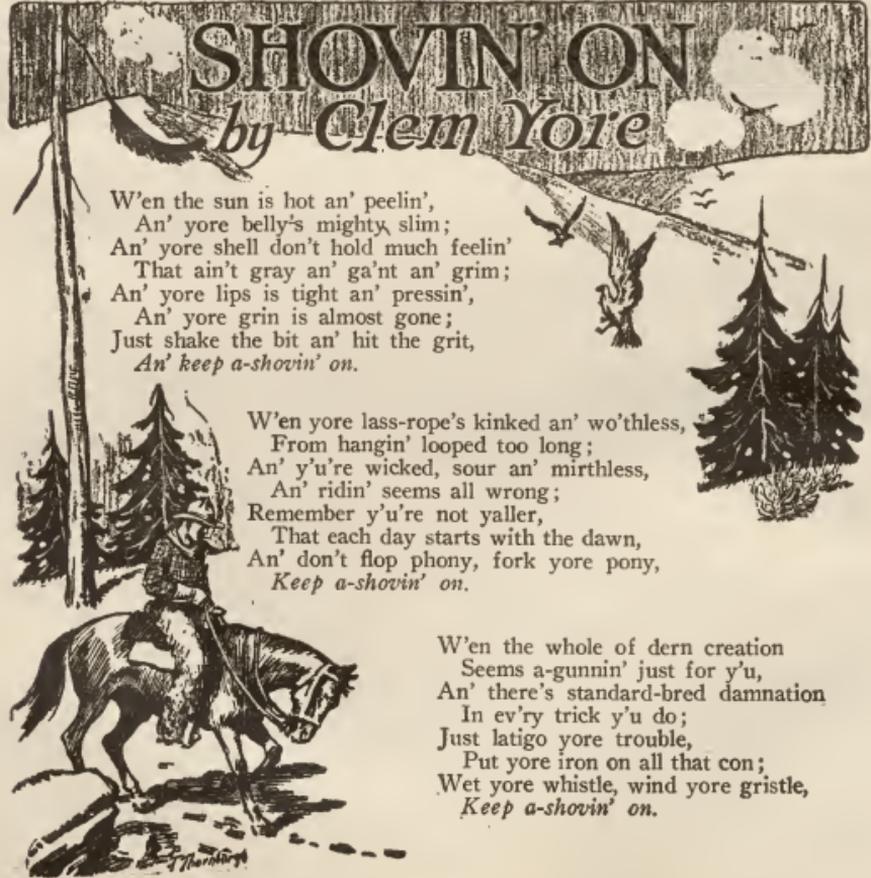
"Did you—? Are they dead?"

"Dead? Naw! Jest kinda fainted. Thought mebbe twenty-thirty years in the pen would be better for them. That would be crude work for a man like me. I just shot a hole in each of their shoulders, that's all. A man fixed that-a-way can't do any shootin'. That is, I shot two of Draper's shoulders and only one of Lakey's—the left. I, I wanted him to go for his gun with his right, but he didn't." He giggled and then beamed quite shamelessly.

And that night, when the prisoners had been delivered to a deputy sheriff, Ed Summers made Uncle Billy Watson's "play acting" of the early morning, real. He did deliver a speech, and he did put Uncle Billy on the payroll for life!

SHOVIN' ON

by Clem Yore



W'en the sun is hot an' peelin',
An' yore belly's mighty slim;
An' yore shell don't hold much feelin'
That ain't gray an' ga'nt an' grim;
An' yore lips is tight an' pressin',
An' yore grin is almost gone;
Just shake the bit an' hit the grit,
An' keep a-shovin' on.

W'en yore lass-rope's kinked an' wo'thless,
From hangin' looped too long;
An' y'u're wicked, sour an' mirthless,
An' ridin' seems all wrong;
Remember y'u're not yaller,
That each day starts with the dawn,
An' don't flop phony, fork yore pony,
Keep a-shovin' on.

W'en the whole of dern creation
Seems a-gunnin' just for y'u,
An' there's standard-bred damnation
In ev'ry trick y'u do;
Just latigo yore trouble,
Put yore iron on all that con;
Wet yore whistle, wind yore gristle,
Keep a-shovin' on.



THE CAMP OF THE SNAKE

By HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Mister Three," "The Devil's Bungalow," etc.

AMONG THE SNOW-TIPPED PEAKS OF KASHMIR, SMITH OF DETROIT WAS TO SEE THAT TO MOLEST THE HIDDEN TOMB OF A MOGUL OF THE CHITRALIS WAS TO AROUSE A DEADLY POWER MORE TERRIBLE THAN ANY MODERN WEAPON

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAIL

ONE dusty morning I found a piece of paper on my desk in the offices of Pan American Motors, on Woodward Avenue, Detroit. It was a yellow paper about as big as my hand and what it said was this:

When convenient, Mr. Hacket would like to see Mr. Smith in his office.

Hacket was about third assistant sales manager of Pan Am., and I was general utility man, with a reputation for getting into trouble. It turned out that Hacket had something worse than trouble on his mind, and that was an idea.

"Ever been in India, Smith?" he asked.

I told him I didn't think so, and he looked as if I was trying to tell him something that was not so. Said my card—application card, filed with the personnel department on entering Pan Am. Motors—had stated distinctly that I had lived there for three years.

"That must be A. L. Smith," I explained, after thinking it over. "He's been laid up for two months with double pneumonia. My name is Alexander McDonald Smith."

This only bothered Hacket for a minute. After all, the idea was not his, and

he saw no reason to worry about it. So he explained things in the rapid fire manner of a young fellow who thinks it's business-like to be swift.

The Pan Am. directors had asked our chiefs why we were not selling more cars to the Orient. We had a few sales and a lot of inquiries from Japan, but India was a blank. Someone had dug up figures to prove that there were so many thousand cars in India and practically none of American make. The climate there in a good part of the country was an all-year affair, like southern California; the oil supply was plenteous and convenient, and so forth. Our competitors, for some reason, were not trying to sell cars there.

You remember how the business part of the U. S. of A., shortly after the war, figured out to launch a government merchant marine in all the seven seas, whichever they may be, and to corner the trade of South America, and drill for oil in Alaska and so forth. Well, Pan American Motors was making more money then than it knew what to do with, and starting plants in Canada and England. With trade in general booming and buzzing, nobody thought of the bumps. Nobody ever does.

So Motors was going to send a representative to India, and Hacket picked me, as hereinbefore related, to find out—transportation and ten dollars a day paid—if there was a market for our cars, and if

not, why not. He added that I could catch the Soo limited out of Chicago the next day and connect with the Canadian Pacific transcontinental at a place called Moose Jaw.



"Which India," I asked, "do you mean?"

No, I was not trying to be humorous. There is a good deal of Scotch in me under the skin—old, sure-enough stuff, inherited—and I wanted to be certain where I was going before starting. The map of the world has a Dutch East Indies and a West Indies, besides an Indo-China, and men like Hacket have been known to overlook bigger things than that. Sure enough, he pawed over his papers and finally went off to ask about it. When he came back he said it was British India. So I listened to another bunch of instructions and went off to clear out my desk, and wait for letters of introduction and tickets. Nobody asked if I wanted to go.

As a matter of fact I did, badly. Any other place would have done as well. It was a dusty morning and the office windows were opened wide for the first time that summer. The jangle of the street cars down Woodward was as bad as the clatter of the typewriters, and I had not set foot off pavement for eight months.

Lord, how a fellow gets to hate the streets, when a straw bonnet and a park and open windows are the only things he can see of a change in the season!

If I had known what sort of a camp I was bound for, a couple of months hence, I'd have yelled out loud. I didn't imagine such a thing and you couldn't if you tried. Think of a few tents bunched over a snow-fed river, three thousand feet below. Trees bigger than the California sequoias, and mountains crowding all around that would make the Rockies look like slag heaps. Fishing for what you want, and big game shooting—well, for stags, bear and such-like.

Man, I've sampled a good many kinds of camps, from the week-end auto parking kind to the government A. E. F. brand, and I want to say right now that this camp was in a class by itself.

Sometimes, when the alarm clock does its stunt and I wake up from dreaming about that place, I'm in a fever to pick up again and start off to it. And then come the chills, when I think of all that happened and of the hours when I cursed A. L. Smith for not going instead of me.

AS I said, Pan American Motors started out to sell the world, and before I'd been in Calcutta a week I thanked my stars I was not a salesman. We had as much chance of selling cars in India as I would have of underscoring an opera.

Outside a shipping cost with a duty tacked on that came to about half the selling price of a car, there were only two reasons why Pan American Motors would never flourish in India. Natives—coolies they call 'em—and bullock carts were sitting around waiting for a chance to haul loads at about a quarter the cents-per-mile a truck would roll up.

"You might investigate Kashmir, Mr. Smith," someone suggested. "A splendid country, you know, just being opened up. It is in the Hills, and I imagine the climate would be a welcome change from this."

Two weeks later I found out that the advice about Kashmir was a merry jest. An Englishman may not see one of our jokes, but he can slip one over and look as serious as an umpire behind the plate in a world's series. I'll tell you about this Kashmir thing when we come to it.

Anything looked better to me than Calcutta, where the climate was borrowed from hell. I wrote a preliminary report, mailed it, and jumped a train for Delhi, pronounced *Dilly*, to see what their capital looked like. But it was hotter than Calcutta, and that was worse than New Orleans in September.

There were some tourists in Delhi, but no sightseeing busses, and not even a tin lizzie at the station. After one ride around the city and down their main street, which has a name like a sneeze and a grunt and means Silver Street, I went back to my room at the hotel and stayed there. Probably it was the heat—I'd been out in the streets of Calcutta regularly from nine to five—but I began to have a queer feeling about this India. Maybe it was caused by the mob of natives, not blacks, but brown men. There must have been a million or so crowded into a place no bigger than Yonkers. And the place had nearly a million smells, all different.

Even in my room the electric fan was not an electric fan. It was a kind of super fly-swatter, worked by a rope, and somewhere I suppose a brown man in a cotton shirt was pulling the rope. Through the screens of the upstairs veranda that was outside my window I could see the domes of

a couple of real palaces and a bunch of ruins.

It made me feel as if I'd arrived in a city that was a couple of thousand years behind the times. All the leading citizens seemed to be dead. At least the ruins they left were the only sights of the place.

WHEN I started to sit down and write another letter to the bunch in the office my brain ceased to act all at once. A man was calling something below the veranda, and when he kept on shouting, I went out to see what was doing.

About a dozen natives were squatting down just below me, and a boy began bowing and pointing to an old man who held a strip of white cloth over his knees.

"*Sahib*," said the boy, "here is a wonder. Will the *sahib* please to watch?"

The old man held out his bare arms and draped the cloth over his wrists. When he lifted it I saw a green shoot in the ground under the place where his hands had been. Then he put back the cloth, and everyone looked at me. The second time he pulled back his arms there was a big twig with green leaves where the shoot had been.

"That's old stuff," I told the boy.

"Yes, *sahib*," he came back at me, seriously, "it is older than we remember. Please to watch."

The sleight-of-hand man stood up, and jerked off the cloth, and pointed to a two foot shrub with some kind of fruit on it. A minute ago that shrub had been a twig. The boy pulled off the fruit and tossed it up. It was a mango, right enough. But I had seen the mango trick before.

The way it works is this: the hand-is-quicker-than-the-eye artist has a small bush with a stem sharpened to a point wrapped up in his apron or sleeve, and when the innocent bystander is busy looking at the twig, he slips it under the cloth. Then he sticks the point in the ground, shakes out the branches a bit and his stuff is done.

"Throw up the bush," I grinned at the boy.

"As the *sahib* wishes." To my surprise he gave the thing a yank and then began to pull. The shrub came up, all right, but it brought with it an honest clump of roots and a wad of earth. The old conjurer looked up at me and his eyes glinted. I tossed them a handful of coppers; it was worth that much, and they began to fight among themselves for the money. All but the boy.

"If the *sahib* will walk in the Sher Bagh garden this night he will see a greater wonder," he promised.

When I tried to get the letter started



again my brain was just as much a blank as before. I kept seeing the Hindu boy and the old conjurer and the mango bush. Especially the bush.

Of course the old man could have had the shrub tucked away in his jumper somewhere, and he could have slipped it under the cloth if he was very clever. And possibly he might have brought along a bush with roots hanging on it, and dug a hole with his hands in the soft, black earth.

He must have done that, because there was no other way to explain the trick. But somehow the explanation did not satisfy me. The roots had come out of the ground as if they had been planted there.

That evening a slicked-up army officer in the dining-room told me where the Sher Bagh was.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST TOUCH

IT WAS a sort of public garden opening off the hotel, with a mosque at the other end. The trees were thick overhead except in the center where there was an opening over a narrow well. Later I learned there was one of those big tanks alongside the mosque wall, where it was hidden by some bushes.

A lantern was over the entrance, and as I came up a boy and a girl walked out. They looked about old enough to be just out of high-school, but the English always look young, and the girl might have been nineteen. She glanced at me once and went on talking, probably thinking an American tourist was nothing but a necessary flaw in the landscape.

She was worth looking at twice, and then some. Her wide, white hat hid her eyes, but she carried her chin up. I don't know what a Greek profile is; still I'll lay odds she had one. She could have stepped into line at the "Follies," and the other girls would have taken time out to give her the double-O.

"Captain Dixon will take you out after *barasang*," she was saying to the boy, "if you'll be an angel and come."

"Rats!" he mumbled. "You know perfectly well the lower Chitral region is all shot out. The only thing really worth while is the high hill game."

They might as well have been talking about psychic research, for all the meaning I got out of that. Not that I stopped to listen; I was watching the girl and wondering how a dress made out of such flimsy stuff seemed to be tailored to fit her. Before they were out of hearing I gathered that he was her brother and broke, having backed the wrong horse at the racetrack, that afternoon. Also that he'd had several shots of the whisky and soda variety. She was urging him to go somewhere with her, and he was kicking about it. That was how I guessed she was his sister.

I scratched a match to start up my pipe, and tried to find a cool spot in the park. The heat was like a veil wrapped over my head, and the place was rank with some kind of flower, acacias, as I saw the next day. There weren't any benches, and I sat down on the stone edge of the well.

The conjuror and the boy were not to be seen, and I wondered how the girl of the white hat looked cool, and what *barasang* was. And then a voice overhead whispered at me, "Do not be frightened, *sahib*. *Atcha, sahib—*"

The stars were blotted out as I looked up, and a human body dropped past me, splashing a dozen feet below, in the well. The light was bad and the thing happened quickly, but I thought it was the boy of the mango trick. At least the voice sounded like his. He had flashed down a foot from my eyes and had hit the narrow mouth of the well without scraping any of the stones.

It takes more than that to make me jump. I scratched a match and shaded it, to look down. The water was quivering and the scum on its top had been split apart. The sides, about four feet apart, were solid rock, without a handhold anywhere.

A few bubbles broke at the surface and then quit coming. The skin on my back began to prickle a bit, when I noticed a snake wiggling around in the scum and thought that the Hindu kid would have a pleasant surprise when he came up. He didn't come. I lit another match from the first, and it burned out. After a third one I knew that anything down in that well would stay down, and half started to

slide in after the kid, figuring that he had bumped his head on a rock.

The snake and another thing helped to keep me where I was. Something tugged at my coat, pulling me back. When I got to my feet and swept an arm around in the darkness under the trees, nothing more happened. For a while I listened at the well without hearing anything.

When a diver comes up after a two minute stay under water he makes a noise like a fat man breathing after a hundred yard dash. I was certain the boy had not taken the air again. The trick began to look serious, and I was half angry, half worried about him. Someone else was in the garden, the gent or lady who had laid a restraining hand on me, and was acting like an unlawful-abiding citizen.

Without striking any more matches I walked back to the hotel veranda and called to the first white man visible. It was the young bird who had been ragging the girl.

"One of the village lads," I said, "has committed suicide in the well, and I am the party who saw him last. Either I've been seeing spooks or we'd better hustle up a pulmotor and a rope."

He looked me over and laughed. "It's a dashed good trick, isn't it? Didn't the old *budmash* come around for some *bak-sheesh*?"

"No," I told him. "And no *bran-mash* either. Suppose the drinks are on me, eh?"

The thin face of the English boy split in a grin and he explained that it was remarkable, very, that the conjuror had not pursued me to the hotel for a tip; *bak-sheesh*, they called it. It was a regular stunt of theirs, and this was how they worked it.

The Hindu child climbed the tree near which I'd been sitting and jumped from a branch, out into the well. He was an experienced diver, and knew how to swim through an under-water-conduit that led to the temple tank, not far away.

Well, we had that drink on the porch, and a couple more, each one different, Arnold Duggendale Carnie doing the suggesting while I did the paying. He told me his name and what horse was sure to win in the race the next day—they only had one, but it was a steeplechase and lasted until tea time. Told me he'd been in the saddle of one of the ponies last week and broken a foreleg—of the horse.

Carnie had alert black eyes and a pleasant laugh and did not seem the type for a jockey. I liked him at sight, thinking

of his sister, and he invited me to come and shoot mountain sheep with him where it was not so damnably hot.

When I started to undress that night I found that several items were missing from my ensemble. A wallet, with letters from the Pan Am. people, with my passport, letters of identification, and a few time-tables. Luckily my traveler's checks were safe, as I kept them scattered, with the big ones in my hip pocket.

CHAPTER III

A WARNING

WHEN my business was attended to in Delhi I wrote that report and mailed it and tried to guess what to do next. The hotel clerks never got beyond the idea I was a tourist and kept telling me to go see the Tag-me-Hal, but when they said it was a tomb I let 'em know I was not selling hearses. After that they let me alone, especially when I reminded them they had not got back my wallet.

Of course I had looked through the Sher Bagh place the next morning, and of course I did not find my stuff. The hotel people sent a man out to look, too, and he found as much as I did. Then he asked me if I wanted to lodge a complaint against the Hindus.

I was fairly certain that the conjurer bird had lifted my wallet under the tree, probably expecting that I carried a fat roll after my display of pennies the afternoon before. Not having recognized either of the natives that evening there was not evidence enough to stir up the police. Somebody had ended the evening richer by my passport and letters that identified me. That was all.

Then I remembered the tip about Kashmir and bought a ticket for it, thinking that it might be a city with some get-up-and-go about it, being a new development.



And then it became clear that I'd been treated rough by the English hombre in

Calcutta, because Kashmir turned out to be a country several thousand years older than India itself. Also a place where there was not anything but mountains. When the people in the hotel spoke of going to the Hills they meant Kashmir.

But let it be here understood that it was far from being dead. In fact Alec Smith, automobile prospector, never entered into a livelier spot.

My introduction to Kashmir began in the train, which was made up of those trick English cars like all-compartment Pullmans with doors opening on the side of the car, and two couches along either wall for the inmates to sleep on.

When I'd stripped off my coat and shoved my bags down to the foot of the couch and changed to a dry shirt I watched the dust and wooden tenements of Delhi slide past and felt better.

"I would strongly advise you to put the valises at the other end," remarked the man who was on the couch opposite. "The train thieves are very expert."

He was a short fellow, middle aged, and he wore an old suit. Nothing unusual about him except his eyes, which were deep-set and brilliant. The book he had been reading was full of printing that looked like shorthand—circles and curls—ques and dots instead of letters; it might have been Sanscrit or Arabic or anything else, but he turned the leaves as if it was a best seller.

Letting the bags stay where they were I told him that I'd made the acquaintance of the native sons already and wanted very much to see them again. I'd bought a six shooter in the Delhi bazaar and meant to use it if another Hindu came after my roll.

My companion's name was Moorcroft, Dr. Paul Moorcroft, and he seemed to be interested in the fate of my wallet, and asked me to describe the boy and the conjurer, and the various things that were stolen. All he said, however, was that it was unusual for professional magicians to try to rob a white man near the hotel, for it spoiled their graft.

"The train thieves are quite a different fraternity, quite," he assured me. "I've known them to slip into the carriages stripped to a loin cloth, with their bodies greased. If you grasp them they slide away like eels, and if the train is stopped for the guard to investigate, they are off into the jungle at once."

"They'd stop for a bullet under the ribs," I pointed out. "And that's all they'd get from me."

He looked at me as if I was a new specimen of carnivorous animal, and turned back to his book, remarking that the native thugs were real professionals, able to lift a money belt from a sleeping passenger. I grinned at him and took out a little volume of Stevenson that always travels with me.

After we'd eaten for the last time, and the lights were touched up I slipped the revolver from my pocket to the back of the sofa and lay down; the money, being in my hip pocket, was under me, with the gun, and I was not worrying about any native turning me over without waking up.

It was about as cool in the compartment as the steam room of a Turkish bath, but it was better than Delhi, and I dozed off while Moorcroft was still turning over the pages of his book. Being a light sleeper, I wakened every time the door rattled or my companion scratched a match.

By and by it was quieter and I was dreaming of jumping into a well full of snakes, when something switched my mind back to consciousness. For a minute or so I lay without opening my eyes, beginning to think instead of dream. It seemed as if more air was coming in than usual, although the train was barely moving.

I opened my eyes a crack and shut them promptly. Moorcroft was no longer in my range of vision, but a man was standing in the center of the compartment, and this man was a native wearing two strips of cloth, one over his head and the other around his hips. His skin was shining, either from sweat or grease and he held a very slender, curved knife in his hand.

In past years sundry surgeons have removed most of the bones from my nose, and part of my jaw is sterling silver where they had to take a splice in it because of sudden collision with some lead. I can look a gun in the eye and take a share in a toe and heel mix-up without worrying any, but a knife sets my skin to creeping. Evidently the native was in the compartment to rob and meant to have something for his trouble. It would not do to let him know I was awake, and only a fool would charge into a knife. A straight-from-the-shoulder wallop will knock out most natives, because they never learn the why and wherefore of a fist. But you can't hit out when you're lying on your back with your eyes shut.

Still pretending I was wrapped in slumber, and wondering all the time what had happened to Moorcroft, I rolled over on

my right side, facing the wall and snored a couple of times to reassure the brown devil. With my back to him I was facing the wall, and had edged off the six-shooter. He could not see it.

Presently I rolled on my back again, with my eyes wide open. The gun, in my right hand, covered the concave space under his ribs. He had drawn closer and the knife was about three feet from my ear.

It was a fifty-fifty proposition and it looked as if both of us would bump off if either moved a finger. Did I say my hands were cold? So were my feet. Then Moorcroft spoke, saying something to the native that meant nothing to me. Without looking away from the thief's eyes I was aware of the doctor sitting up at the end of his couch with a finger marking the place in the book where he'd left off reading.

What he said in Hindustani he never explained, but the native stepped back and shoved the knife in his girdle.

"Put the revolver aside, Mr. Smith," my companion remarked to me. "It would never do to shoot this chap, you know."

"Then make him lie down and hold his hands up behind his back," I countered.

Moorcroft gabbled something, and our visitor dropped to his knees and proceeded to bump his forehead against the floor at the Englishman's feet, as if Moorcroft was a tin god.

Then he glided toward the door and was half through before I managed to grab his arm. He grinned at me good-naturedly and his bare arm slipped through my fingers like a fish's fin. It felt as if it had been oiled. When I reached the door and looked out along the running board he was gone.

The train was only crawling, and a thick mesh of forest lined the right of way like a wall. A wild pig, startled by the light and the noise, plunged away, crushing down bamboo shoots and lush grass in its path.

"Young man," observed Moorcroft, "you've had your warning."

Going back to my bunk I got out my pipe. "Let's hear it."

"That *pahari* could have knifed you, before or after you foolishly displayed a weapon."

"Was he a thief?"

"Most men are." Moorcroft's yellow face seemed to grow sharper as he looked at me. "We Anglo-Saxons pride ourselves on our respectability, and yet for

generations we've been rambling around the world breaking open graves and carting away shrines out of Asia to sell, or set up in some dismal museum in London or Chicago. Yes, that *pahari* is a thief and the son of a thug. I once patched up his



sire after a tiger clawed his ribs loose, and the hill people never forget a service."

His big eyes glowed queerly and his lips sneered. "I was in Pekin when the Allies broke in to loot after the Boxer show, and I saw Cossacks and British marines ripping down ancestral tablets of gold, tablets that the Chinese believe are the incarnate spirits of their ancestors. Yet in London or New York if a man robs a grave we call him a ghoul."

"You win, Doctor," I told him. But I didn't swallow all the dose he gave me. Who would? The whole thing looked queer—the *pahari* bird coming into the compartment like that, and then going through a daily dozen head-bobbing. And it turned out later that my hunch was a good one. "Is there any more to the lesson?"

Moorcroft began to talk like a professor. I wished later I had paid more attention to what he said.

The main point of it was that he was warning me not to meddle with anything that turned up under my nose in India. When they wanted to, the Hindus could arm themselves with weapons that left white men no chance at all. Moorcroft named over poisons that could kill a man daily for a couple of years, and stimulants like *bhong* and *hasheesh* that could make a native give one whoop and run out and slaughter any Europeans who happened along, and feel blissful doing it.

"Must have some kick, that drink," I told him.

He went on to say magic, the real variety, was practiced by Hindus and such-like.

"I've seen their snake charmers and mango growers," I agreed, "and our vaudeville artists put it all over them. You can't tell me there are any real magicians."

Those shining eyes of his fastened on me, and he smiled. He'd seen a conjurer throw one end of a rope up into the air and the rope stay upright. And a boy

climb up the rope and vanish, and a tiger come down by and by. Said it was a stunt they didn't do now except for visiting kings and a few others.

"I think it is accomplished by group hypnotism," he added. "The Hindus are adept at mesmerizing the spectators; we do not realize what they are up to, and they never explain. We have never attempted to measure their powers, because we have been too busy making money."

I thought of the mango shrub, and sniffed. The warm odor of the forest was sweeping through the train like an incense, and the prickly heat was starting up all over me.

"Another thing, Mr. Smith, I have seen Buddhist priests thrust knives into their bodies, utterly without feeling the pain. And once a wandering lama stopped at my tent who could communicate his thoughts to kinsmen a thousand miles away. To the white men who dwell within her northern borders India is a riddle, ages old. The fascination of this—" he swept a thin hand around at the carriage windows—"gets under our skin in time. Some of us learn a very few of the mysteries, and try to forget what we know."

Moorcroft leaned forward to touch my knee, and I felt like pulling away from him.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "God help the white man who yields to the lure of the mysteries. He becomes a slave more dangerous than a drug maddened Malay."

"What about that warning?" I reminded him. "Where do I figure in this?"

"Someone wanted your papers and took them, Mr. Smith. When you did not take the hint to go away, this native was sent, either to rob you of your money or to kill you. If I were you, I would return at once to Calcutta and book a passage for home."

Now there was no reason why anybody should wish a war on me; certainly the prospects of American autos invading India was a lost hope, and why should a trade competitor want to bump me off, anyway? I laughed and got out my flask, offering it to Moorcroft.

"You can't sell me any line about magic, Doctor," I grinned. "And these mysteries died in the middle ages. But you certainly help to pass the time. I'm going to see Kashmir."

He refused a drink and went back to his book, paying no more attention to me at all.

CHAPTER IV

AN INN WITHOUT A KEEPER

A DAY or so later, we got out at a junction where there was a real breeze and rocks and trees that looked natural. A narrow gauge railway took me up to a kind of pleasure resort, which I passed by, wishing to see more of the country. It was all mountains, each range higher than the last, and a fellow traveler told me there was a station a few days' ride up and in, so I took one bag and hopped into a mail cart with two ponies and two wheels and a bearded pirate to drive it.

Lord, how that man did drive! We left the post road and climbed for two days up into trails that hung on the sides of hills. We skidded around corners with my overcoat flapping over a sheer precipice, and across log bridges that swayed up and down close above a river that looked like the rapids of the St. Lawrence. The smell of the pines was mighty good after the mixtures of Delhi. I saw a peak covered with snow ahead of us, and also a mass of black, rushing cloud to windward. The leaves on the birches turned white side up and the sunlight became sickly. Judging by the driver's curses a thunderstorm was no joke in this country.

Just then we rounded a turn and nearly bumped an auto stalled in the trail. The native driver reined his steeds up the bank a bit and maneuvered past, but I signaled for him to stop.

The car was one of those English models, light, with a long wheel base and plenty of power. One man, a tall chap with a brown, likeable face and a dinky mustache, was testing out the ignition system and wasting no time about it. The young chap beside him hailed me.

"Hullo, Smith, did you have any money on Sir Havelock? He came in nicely, you must admit."

It was Arnold Carnie, and his sister was in the rear seat. The other fellow went by the name of Dixon—evidently the Captain Dixon I had heard them speak of in Delhi—and Carnie assured me cheerfully that if they did not get the bus working before the storm broke they would be in a fine jam because the trail would be muddy and the bridges would be slippery elm.

After watching Dixon working a while I thought the ignition was O. K. Carnie said they'd tested out the gas line and that was all right. I didn't feel like leaving Miss Carnie parked in the mud on the

edge of a half mile drop into the river, and asked if they minded my tinkering with the carburetor.

It was a brand I'd never seen before, but they all work on the same principle. I found it was a mess of dirt, and cleaned it out, and got the float to functioning again. This done the motor sputtered a bit when we cranked her up and finally began to purr in a business-like way.

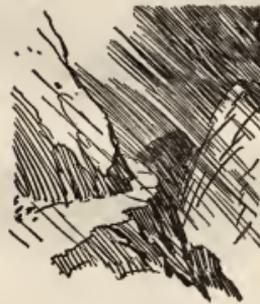
"Come along, Smithy," Carnie urged. "We might break down again, you know."

I asked if they were going to the Chitral station.

"Either that or the river, as the case may be."

The prospect of a real ride was tempting, and I yanked my bag from the cart and climbed in as Dixon, who took the wheel, slipped in his clutch and started with a jerk that nearly landed me in the girl's lap. The wind whined in the kbaki top, and our dust swept out over the gorge in a great plume. The sun had quit altogether, and Dixon switched on his lights and trod on the gas until we were making more than thirty along that trail built for mules and carts. He seemed to know the road, and took the turns at a rate that sent loose stones rattling over the great divide.

As thunderstorms sometimes do, this one held off for several miles. Then the far-



off trees began to thresh and a red glare shone out along the crests across the valley. Thunder went off right overhead and when the first flash came it glittered on a million raindrops.

Dixon eased the car up close to an overhanging rock that protected us from the full force of the storm. We wrapped the girl up in blankets and listened to rocks bouncing down the hillside and caroming over our heads. Now and then a tree cracked and I heard one fall not far behind us.

The storm was beyond us in a few minutes; the sun darted into rolling mist that looked like clouds and glowed red from the light behind it. The rumble of the river came up stronger than ever as we went on.

Again Dixon drove as if he never wanted to reach the hotel alive. I've been at

the wheel in one or two transcontinental sprints, and I know that mountain driving isn't as bad as it looks, when the road bed is dry. But we were skidding up to bridges and slithering down drops that might have ended in a washout.

Miss Carnie gasped once or twice and even the youthful Arnold called a halt when the trail forked.

"We'll never make the climb to the station, Larry," he gave out. "Not in this mud, you confounded Jehu! So be a good chap and edge off to the lumber camp; somebody's there, I'm sure, and Gordon can dry out, at least."

Dixon looked at him as if he was going to object, then thought better of it and swung into the right fork, into a forest of big pines, and I took my feet off the floorboards where they'd been clamped for an hour. About twilight we came out of a winding trail to the edge of the gorge again, and a cluster of tents.

It was really one tent with a scattering of huts, but the tent was more like a pavilion. Some native servants came from the shacks and helped us carry in our bags. Captain Dixon ran the car under some of the thickest foliage—the whole place was a grove of big pines, visible in the glare of the headlights—and I heard him swearing at the natives because they didn't rig a tarpaulin over it properly.

There were lamps going in the big tent. The thing was divided up into rooms and passageways like a bungalow; oriental rugs covered every inch of the floorboards, and the lamps were queer affairs, with a big Chinese lantern painted like a dragon, hung from the silk top of each of the two main compartments.

One of these looked like a reception hall with a kerosene stove with a few bearskins and leather cushions slung around. I only saw one chair in the tent, in the next room, which must have been the owner's study. This had a teakwood table, some bookshelves and other shelves stacked with bundles of clippings and papers. The chair by the table was black hardwood, carved all over, with gilt patterns and it looked as if it might have been a throne, some time or other.

Across the passageway were three sleeping compartments in a row, every one with a cot and rug and washstand. I looked into the fourth compartment at the back of the passage on the side away from the entrance and found that it was full of stores, foodstuffs, kerosene, blankets, medicines and so forth.

The doors, except the front entrance were just openings in the partitions, curtained off. I went out and examined it to find out why the heat kept in so well. The tent had double sides and top. A big tarp was stretched on a frame of eight inch bamboo, and the guys were inch manila rope anchored around logs that were sunk in the ground. Besides, the dense growth of pines protected it from the worst of the wind that I could hear moaning 'way up over my head.

Arnold Carnie called me. "Dinner is on the rug, Smithy. Our host is absent, so we've conscripted his house boys and some excellent port."

As he said, the natives were serving a hot meal of rice and mutton, with those *chupatty* cakes, in the reception room, and we all squatted down on the animal skins to eat. Dixon didn't trouble to ask permission to make ourselves at home, because hospitality in these places is a matter of course, and we were only taking things for granted.

In the lamp light Dixon looked more than a little tired. He had a lined face, yellow brown like many Englishmen who spend their lives in that steam sunbath of a place. He said practically nothing, though he was attentive to Gordon Carnie and I suspected they were engaged.

Dixon and Miss Carnie paid little heed to me, though they were polite enough. But Arnold was the kind that makes everybody his friend—or enemy. He explained that the owner was away on a hike or hunt, and the tent was really a native affair, the kind used by Indian dukes or dignitaries when they traveled a bit.

Two things struck me as queer. There weren't any chairs, except the one curio. And I had not seen any guns stacked in the den. The man had skins enough to mark him for a hunter, and that sort usually keeps a small arsenal on hand. But I had an idea that I knew the name of the tent dweller. On the den table I noticed a black book that was either the one Moorcroft had been reading on the train or its twin. And I was not over pleased at stumbling on Dr. Paul Moorcroft again.

CHAPTER V

THE CHIMNEY

IT DID not seem as if I'd been asleep at all when someone waked me up by flashing an electric torch in my eyes. I chucked off my blankets and sat up, and

Arnold Carnie whispered to me not to make so much noise.

We had bunked in the storeroom, using some of the extra blankets, and I saw by my watch that it was four A. M. Arnold cut off my questions by saying that one of his "bearers" had come up with a couple of rifles, having walked from the place where the luggage cart had parked for the night, at the fork in the trail. The Carnie's heavy stuff had been sent after them by native cart.

"That's fair enough," I told him, sitting on my fingers to warm them, "but why turn out the guard?"

"Barasang, Smithy," he grinned. "This is the hour when all good hunters arise and curse. Remember I promised to take you with me on *shikar*."

That godless youth meant what he said, and I crawled into pants and shoes, pulling on a sheepskin jacket that he requisitioned from somewhere. Then we had a swallow of rum and a biscuit apiece and went out to where a couple of natives stood shivering. We managed to slip by without waking the others. Dixon was breathing away in his compartment next to us, and Miss Carnie evidently had the place reserved for guests, in the front of the tent. Moorcroft's sleeping compartment was still dark and soundless.

Arnold flashed his torch over the rifles, and offered me my choice in a whisper. I selected the Enfield and left him the .25 Mannlicher that the other bearer carried. The natives shouldered the rifles and one went ahead to act as guide. Later I was sorry that we had thrown the spotlight on the guns like that.

The wind bit like a knife and my thighs ached below the sheepskin. Before we'd gone a mile I was puffing, although Carnie and the hunters pushed ahead without a stumble or a halt. I've done a bit of shooting in my time, and, if I do say so, can manage to hit what I'm aiming at now and then, though perhaps my style is somewhat my own. Some guys can figure up range by their sights and a piece of paper and a lightning calculation as to the size of trees and houses at a certain distance. Not me. I guess the range and watch where the first shot lands. I always let the other fellows worry and test the wind and change their slings a few times before the firing begins. After that I'm at home.

Maybe this will explain why I didn't guess all that was due to happen around the camp before it did. You can't tell me

that any hombre ever knew anything was going to occur by putting two and two together, outside of the mob of Sherlock Holmes's in books.

We hiked for about an hour, when we reached a high plateau and halted in a nest of boulders that we could see in the half light that comes before the dawn. Arnold told me to watch the mists clear away from the line of trees about two hundred yards



distant. Between the trees and our rocks was a level clearing and he explained that deer were apt to feed along the edge of the brush at sunrise. I knew that at this hour game is easiest to stalk. By now the peaks on our right were standing out, black against a long glow of green and scarlet. The wind developed a new kick and the white mist began to thin.

Then trees began to take shape and look natural. We stepped back, deeper into the shadow of the rocks, and one of the natives pushed the Enfield into my hand. I had seen nothing stirring around the trees, but he pointed down into a depression.

Several doe were getting up, grazing toward the brush, and a big buck was just entering the shadows where we were sure to lose sight of him. I sighted and whispered to Arnold to shoot first. His gun cracked almost as I spoke, and the deer stood absolutely still for a second, every head up.

I pressed the trigger and the Enfield kicked back. The buck had been stung by one of our shots—my fingers were chilled and I think I pulled down, missing him entirely. The last shreds of mist hid him as he started off along the line of the trees. When he was nearly opposite us I took a chance and fired again. This time he gave a long bound and went down in a heap.

"*Shabash!* Well done, Smithy!" cried Arnold.

The two natives hustled over and met us half way across the clearing, grinning and staring at me admiringly. Carnie forgot his own disappointment as he measured the spread of the horns with a tape and

counted the points, and complimented me generously.

"Never saw it done before, Smithy old boy, on my word. Two hundred and twelve yards—I paced it—a running deer and a poor light. Hullo, here's where I creased his flank."

"Which is more than I did with one shot," I assured him.

We left the hunters to remove the head and strip off the best of the meat while we walked back with the rifles. The sun was just coming up over the snow peaks. The big gorge, along which we headed, was still a shadowy pit with the whole world overhead flaming purple and red and a deep blue-green. I can't begin to tell what it looked like. You'll have to go to the Himalayas and watch the sun rise to know. The air was like old wine, and almost as heady. I was walking along trying to see and smell everything at once when Arnold shouted at me: "Hold up, Smithy! Steady, my lad, and watch where you are going to put your feet."

Half expecting to see a snake on the ground, I stopped short and looked down, and the part of me under the ribs began to burn and send fiery waves up under my skull. There was nothing in front of me at all.

A sort of chasm ran back here, from the edge of the cliff, a gash in the rock where a few stunted cedars clung, hiding the drop. In between the cedars I could see an almost sheer drop of several hundred feet and, far down under the cliff, the valley bed and the shine of the river a mile below. The gash was not more than twenty feet across and it ran back from the face of the cliff only a stone's throw, but two steps more would have sent me caroming down the chute.

"This is where poor Cobden died," Arnold explained as I circled back. "He was Dixon's manager, you know. He was at work here with the tree cutters a few weeks ago, just beginning the day, after sunrise. Larry says he must have been full of the scuppers, because the natives heard him shout. Then they saw him run a few steps and crash down through those cedars." He glanced down thoughtfully.

It struck me, as I listened to Arnold, that a man would need to be pretty well tanked up to run down into the chimney, as he called the hole. If this Englishman, Cobden, had been the boss of a gang of lumberjacks, he must have known the country around here pretty well. Anyone who looked down the chimney once would

not be likely to forget it was there. In fact a semi-circle of pine stumps as high as a man's head stood around it, and all along here, at the edge of the main gorge, the biggest pines had been cut. Further on we saw men at work, Hindu coolies hacking away at a great pair of *morinda* pines, a dozen feet through at the base. I asked Arnold how the timber was sent to the sawmills.

"Floated, Smithy," he answered lightly. "The trunks are rolled or hauled by *yaks* to the edge of the gorge. Then they are dumped over, and floated down into India on the river."

Captain Lawrence Dixon, he explained, was part owner of this forest concession. He and a couple of others had bought out the ancestral rights of some little native rajah who needed ready cash.

The English government had put a stop to wholesale timber cutting in the Himalayas a generation ago, but had allowed the native rulers the privilege of limited cutting. The preservation of the big trees, as in California and elsewhere at home, was important to preserve the water supply of heat ridden India. The chief who had sold out to Dixon and his partners was more interested in building up a racing stable in Delhi and in buying phonographs and radios than in keeping his forests safe for autocracy.

Anyway, Dixon had come up to look over the work, which had been delayed after the death of Cobden, his manager. The tribe that had sold the big trees to him—Arnold called them Chitralis—were objecting to his felling a group of the deodars which were valuable. The rajah of the Chitralis claimed that this particular grove sheltered the grave of his gone-and-forgotten ancestors; he had forgotten the grove when the contract was drawn up and signed. The trees belonged to Dixon and his partners; but, with the Chitralis acting ugly, the Hindus who were working for Dixon had kept their distance from the grove that had caused the dispute.

"Those infernal Hindus are like sheep," Arnold told me. "With a white man to tell them what to do, they'll go ahead and tear down somebody's castle. That's why the work has been held up. A crazy white man warned them to refrain from trespassing in the sacred grove."

He pointed ahead to our camp, in a nest of the big pines that loomed up at the end of the cleared tract. It stood on a knoll, and we could see the gray canvas of the tent. "You see, Smithy," Arnold grinned.

"we've wandered into the marquee of the chap who's taken a stand against Larry and his honest toilers. That's his tent."

"And he," I remarked, "is Dr. Moorcroft."

"I don't know the blighter's name. Larry keeps his mouth damnably well shut about his affairs. Hullo, there he is, with that *babu*."

Dixon and a big Hindu who wore European clothes and a turban were walking along the edge of the gorge toward us. He asked where we had been and Arnold told him about the stag. The *babu*, it seemed, was a kind of clerk and overseer and had been in charge of the lumber camp after Cobden went west. His name was Anim Dass, and he greeted us as if Arnold was the Prince of Wales and I was an ace of big game hunters.

"Oh, *sahib*," he grinned, "Oh, my friends, you must infallible go out to make havoc among bears if this night is clear."

Anim Dass had learned his English from textbooks, and the way he slung around big words was a caution. So were his clothes. Arnold told me later that he had got together a French navy captain's dress jacket and the pants of a pre-war Russian ensign. When Arnold questioned him the *babu* explained that several bears were in the habit of coming down from the higher ground to root around in the clearings, and the moon was good enough to shoot by.

"That's a lark," cried the youngster. "Want to come with us, Anim Dass?"

"Impossible, quite, *sahib*. My bones not being adapted to this extremely cold climate."

I wondered if the *babu* was not a little cautious about venturing out where the Chitralis might find him, and I asked Carnie if he thought it was all right to leave his sister in the camp when the natives were acting ugly.

"My dear chap," he laughed, "she's safer here than in Calcutta or New York, for that matter. These Chitralis wouldn't think of scragging a *feringhi*."

He meant a white man. But, remembering Dr. Moorcroft and the train thief, I wondered if Arnold was right and the doctor wrong, or the other way around.

AFTER breakfast—and it was a meal fit for the gods, superintended by Gordon Carnie under one of the giant deodars—the luggage of Dixon's party came up and Arnold set to work bossing the natives who were pitching the three tents near the big pavilion. I hung

around, hoping that Gordon Carnie might want to try her hand at deer shooting, but she went off to join Dixon, and I strolled into the grove to inspect it.

The trees covered more ground than I thought, running back from the tents to a small, round clearing, where there was a kind of hillock. On the top of this loose stones had been piled. It looked as if the ground had been cleared a long time ago, because vines and briers overgrew the boulders.

I did not go near it because it had all the signs of a snake colony, and just then Dr.



Paul Moorcroft was standing with his back to me, looking at it. About a dozen strange natives were squatting at his heels. They were slender men with thin faces, and all wore a kind of peaked woolen cap instead of turbans, and carried knives and short, curved swords in their belts. I suspected these were the Chitralis Arnold had been talking about and it turned out I was right.

The doctor might have been praying to the stone heap, with the gang for a congregation. I stayed where I was, behind some shrubs, until another peaked cap came running up, and Moorcroft gabbled with the natives for a moment. They were frowning and fingering their knives, and when Moorcroft turned away they scattered among the trees. They were out of sight in a second, and I kept an eye on the bushes, heading after the doctor. He went too fast for me to catch up before he left the big trees and struck out into the open.

Dixon and a half dozen Hindus were forming around the furthest of the deodars, at the edge of the grove by the brink of the gorge. As Moorcroft came up, four axes began to ring on the trunk.

"Captain Dixon! Captain Dixon!" The doctor waved his arms and shouted. "This will never do!"

Coming to the tree he said something sharply to the natives and they lowered their axes, looking at the captain. Dixon glanced at me, then at Moorcroft and raised one eyebrow.

"The deodars are not to be touched," Moorcroft panted. "Great Scott, man, haven't you wood enough without cutting into the grove over the Chitral tomb?"

Miss Carnie seemed surprised by the man's objection, and Moorcroft's nervous face was whitish, his dark eyes blazing.

"I have been over the grove pretty thoroughly, sir," replied Dixon in his quiet way, "and I have failed to discover any sign of a tomb. Where is it? And *what* is it?"

Moorcroft grew red, and stopped a second to think.

"The point is, Captain Dixon, by cutting these trees you are enraging the Chitrali tribesmen and laying up trouble for the government."

I noticed that he avoided the matter of the tomb, but Dixon brought him back to it quickly enough. "If the grave is empty," Dixon began, "I fail to see——"

"It is *not* empty!" cried the doctor. "There is a body in it, and——"

"And what?"

"And the natives have a long standing veneration for this grove. The name *deodar* is derived from the Sanscrit *devadar*, which signifies a god or the place of a deity. Hundreds of years ago this site was selected for the tomb of one of the Chitrali kings. The present rajah assumed that it would not be molested when he sold his timber rights."

Dixon had been studying the owner of the tent, and now he smiled as if he had made up his mind.

"I think we are indebted to you, Moorcroft, for your absentee hospitality last night," he said. "Please accept our thanks. As to the tomb, you are talking quite over my head, you know. We are not molesting any grave. Cutting the trees will not disturb anything under the earth. The land is the rajah's, the timber is mine."

He ordered the staring Hindus to carry on with the chopping and the axes began to ring again. I started to take him aside to explain that Moorcroft was slightly cracked on the subject of graves, when Gordon Carnie spoke up.

"Isn't Dr. Moorcroft really in the right, Lawrence?" she asked, her brown eyes thoughtful. "It's such a pity to do away with these beauties."

Dixon wasn't the kind of man that can be wheedled by a woman, and he shook his head.

"No can do, Gordon. These deodars represent a hundred thousand square feet

of excellent pine, needed in India, also several hundred pounds, which my associates have paid to this rajah. I can't let my partners down, you know."

She seemed to realize the truth of this, and sighed. Then Moorcroft made a mistake. I think if Miss Carnie had been left alone she might have argued Dixon into something, because she seemed set on leaving the deodars as they were.

"Man," cried the doctor harshly, "can't you see the danger? Doesn't Cobden's death mean anything to you? Will you go on, after that? He died the morning his men started work on the grove."

For half a minute Dixon stood perfectly still, as if following out a new line of thought. His eyes narrowed and his brown face became drawn and I saw that underneath his quiet manner he had a temper to be reckoned with.

"Then Cobden's fall was not an accident, Dr. Moorcroft? Kindly explain."

"How can I explain, if you cannot understand?" He turned to the girl. "Miss Carnie, please believe that I am earnest in my warning. I advise you to move your camp away from the grove and—to return to Simla at once."

"But why, Dr. Moorcroft?" she asked frankly.

He pointed up at the trees.

"This place was selected for the grave of one of the Chitrali rulers three hundred years ago, for a reason. Perhaps you will understand me when I say that there are forces guarding it from intrusion. These forces are invisible, but their power is very great."

"Snakes?" I asked, and he laughed.

"My dear Smith, would a snake drive a sane and courageous white man over a thousand foot cliff? I refer to Cobden."

"But he was drunk," I pointed out.

"He was not. I saw him go past the grove just before sunrise, with his men. Cobden was not a drinking man and he was perfectly sober; yet half an hour later he acted as if——" Moorcroft hesitated. "A delirious patient would stagger and shout like that. He seemed to be blind. His mentality must have been abnormal at that moment, because he had been subjected to an overpowering stimulant."

"What was that?" Dixon asked shortly. "Fear."

We looked at each other, and there were shadows under the captain's eyes. Presently he smiled.

"Moorcroft, you can't expect to frighten me into leaving the valley. You are the

rajah's friend. I understand he's helped you with your research work. I don't know how much he's offered you, to make us leave this valuable timber uncut. If you'll show me this *mazar*, this grave or holy place, I'll order my men to take care not to injure it."

The doctor shook his head and muttered something under his breath in Hindustani, and I saw Dixon look down at him sharply. Then, as he turned away, Moorcroft stretched out both hands toward the girl helplessly.

"Miss Carnie," he appealed, "I am trying to help you. I know the secret of this place, and I beg you for the last time to leave the valley, with your brother."

"But why?" She held back a laugh. "And what is this secret?"

Then he said a strange thing. "It would do no good to tell you."

By now I was pretty sure that Moorcroft was warped in the upper works, and this was not pleasant to think about, with him parked across the clearing from our tents.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT GORDON CARNIE SAW

AFTER a little while it occurred to me that Anim Dass must know something about the death of Cobden. In a curious way the account Moorcroft gave of the man's end fitted in with my doubts, when I had studied the chimney. I found the overseer walking alone in the grove, which was a little surprising, at that hour of the day.

A quarter of an hour later I had him sized up as a chap who could tell as many lies to the minute as I could think of questions. He had not seen Cobden fall, he swore, but some of his men had. And they said the *feringhi*—the white man—had seen a ghost. Anim Dass, being educated, scoffed at the idea of spirits, and was certain that Cobden had stumbled at the edge of the declivity leading into the chimney and had lost his head.



"Did Cobden *sahib* find the shrine in this wood?" I asked the *babu* suddenly, having a theory of my own I wanted to test.

"Indeed not, *sahib*," responded Anim

Dass promptly. "He found no sign of it."

I might have believed the fellow if he had said he did not know. How could he be certain if Cobden had located it or not?

"I have heard this grave has gold or—jewels in it," I remarked casually, having heard no such thing. Anim Dass looked incredulous, too incredulous to satisfy me.

"Quite impossible!" he cried. "Or his highness the rajah, Babur el-Sulaiman, of Chitral, would have removed the stones and dug them up." And Anim Dass shrugged his plump shoulders, looking sleekly indifferent to the whole thing. He was too clever for me to get anything out of, and a bit too clever to be honest. I thought he knew where the grave or shrine was, also that it was placed under some stones, maybe statues or tombstones. But I wouldn't have trusted the *babu* with a pocketful of German marks.

My theory was not a pleasant one, but it stuck like the latest Tin Pan Alley jazz. Moorcroft, having a mania against white men who intruded on native no-trespassing ground, had managed to dump Cobden down the chimney; Anim Dass knew what had happened, pretty well, but was keeping his mouth shut, and was probably being paid to do it. The fact that there were several versions of how Cobden had died proved that someone was lying.

Just as I had reasoned thus far, the big deodar the men were working on swayed and began to roar down to the ground. I saw Anim Dass turn and look and his skin grew several shades lighter when the tree thudded on earth. He licked his lips and his brown eyes flickered all around, like a snake when a stick is poked at it. If ever a man was scared, Anim Dass was that man.

He soon recovered when nothing more happened and we rambled over to the spot and watched the coolies lop off the branches, which were small compared to the great bole. Then they cut off the top and cleared a place near the butt, where Anim Dass painted the mark of the Dixon company.

As soon as this was done the trunk was worked to the edge of the steep slope with skids and tackle and shoved off. It crashed down, crushing the undergrowth, and boomed off a ledge of rock. By the time it reached the valley bed it looked the size of a match and it was split in two parts.

I saw that Anim Dass was staring at it; and the coolies muttered a lot. A high wind came up of a sudden and I turned back to the wood, where it was warmer,

and where I hoped to find signs of Arnold or the tomb that was making all this trouble. Neither one was to be seen. I've a pretty good pair of eyes and I quartered all the area under the deodars and even pushed into the thickets without uncovering any headstone or marker. It was getting dark by then and I struck back to the camp and found Arnold Carnie sitting by an open fire polishing the stock of his pet rifle. He had been asleep most of the day.

That wind was still sweeping over us, and I could feel the tree tops weaving in and out, though down by the fire the air was hardly stirring. Somehow or other, I kept looking up, as if I could see something up there. Because I was restless, perhaps, it struck me all of a sudden that there was something over our heads that was coming along with the wind.

This restlessness must have been on account of the heights all around us, also because of the elevation of the grove itself. Six or eight thousand feet above sea level always affects a man a bit; the blood doesn't run normally.

Anyway I had a hunch that the Carnies ought not to be in that camp. When I told Arnold that I did not feel easy about Moorcroft, he laughed.

"Rot, Smithy. The doctor is one of the learned heads of India. His book on the customs and legends and— and so forth, of the hill tribes is classic. He's as sane as you are."

He wiped the oil off the rear sight and glanced across the clearing at the huts of Moorcroft's followers.

"The Chitralis may turn ugly, 'count of this sacred wood. If so, you'll see something worth while my lad—Larry Dixon stirred up. He could handle the whole tribe and the rajah thrown in. But if you're seeing ghosts, I'll ask Gordon to come with us tonight. She's game for bears and moonlight."

ABOUT an hour after the moon had climbed over the peaks we set out again, Miss Carnie with us. Captain Dixon stayed behind to go over accounts with Anim Dass, and Moorcroft's tent was dark when we passed it. It grew colder as we worked up the edge of the gorge, moving slowly after the two natives who did not seem as keen about bears as they were about deer.

In fact there was nothing stirring along the gorge. Miss Carnie had kept quiet, like a good hunter, for an hour or so, until we came out on a knoll and the two

natives joined us. Then she chuckled and asked Arnold where his black bears were. Her brother ordered the men on, but they insisted they were too chilled to go up the gorge any further, and I noticed that they were shivering.

"Why, it's not cold," whispered Gordon Carnie, "now that the wind has gone down."

I hadn't noticed until then that the gale had stopped, because the underbrush was still swaying and rustling around the hillock. But the girl was right. No air was stirring. The steep slope of the gorge lay just behind us, and the tops of the cedars that lined the silver of the river were absolutely still. I remember this because I wondered what was moving the bushes.

"Here comes one," Arnold whispered to me eagerly. "Your first shot, Smithy."

He raised the muzzle of his rifle and I knocked it down with my left arm. The thing advancing toward us through the high grass and bushes was on two legs and when it came out into clear moonlight we recognized Anim Dass. The *babu* was half running, half staggering and he was panting as if he'd come a long way with the throttle wide open.

"Great Scott!" cried Arnold softly. "Look at his face!"

I had been watching the swaying bushes, figuring that a bear or something similar was at his heels. When I looked at his face I thought the moonlight was playing tricks with my eyes. It does, sometimes. Anim Dass was as white as the girl beside me. And his mouth was twisted into a kind of fixed, crooked grin.

"Stop, man!" I shouted. "Back up—sit down! Look ahead of you!"

He was running toward the slope that led down into the chimney where Cobden had fallen to his death. Our knoll overlooked the chasm, about a hundred yards away. Anim Dass stumbled to his knees, got up and plunged forward jerkily.

Arnold shouted and began to run down, toward the edge of the drop. Either the *babu* did not hear us or he was too frightened to understand what we said. Nothing came out of the bushes after him, and he would have been perfectly safe if he stayed where he was.

He stumbled and trotted forward as if he was being pulled by something we could not see. Men caught out in the open in a hurricane might have rolled along like that. Carnie took a desperate chance in skirting the edge of the drop to reach him. He was stretching out his hand to grip the

man, when Anim Dass, with that fixed, silly grin on his face, leaped forward and down the chasm.



a mile below.

Loose stones poured down with him, and a piece of rock crashed loose. It seemed like a whole minute later that I saw the last of the *babu* whirling down the face of the cliff half

her know how he is laid up. Second, is to keep a watch at her tent until daylight."

Arnold lied like a gentleman and told the girl Dixon had started to walk to Chitral, some six miles away, and would not be back until noon. Said he'd left a note with his servant.

Gordon looked at me quickly, with a woman's instinct for getting at the truth. Her fine eyes were dark with anxiety, and I knew she must care a whole lot about Dixon.

"Is Larry—hurt, Mr. Smith?"

I started to say that he was hale and well and checked myself just in time. Anim Dass had taught me a lesson or two in lying, and I remembered that I couldn't very well be supposed to know how a man was, six miles away.

"If you want, Miss Carnie," I offered, "I'll hike over to Chitral and find out. He can't be with us until after breakfast."

She shook her head and thought for a moment. "Captain Dixon ought to know about the—the accident. Poor Anim Dass! Arnold, you must call his servant and send the boy with a message to Chitral."

This would have been the logical thing to do, if Dixon had been in the native town, instead of slumbering off a sweet mixture of dope and booze in his tent. If we told the girl the truth, she'd have thought we were making up another story, and, anyway, she'd want to go to Dixon and convince herself he was not in need of nursing.

We were all a bit shaken by watching that *babu* take a flying leap over the cliff, but it took more than that to put Arnold down for the count. He pushed his sister into the open flap of the tent and explained that Dixon had found something wrong with the accounts of Anim Dass that evening and had gone off at once to Chitral to check up with the rajah. He said he'd find Dixon's servant and send him off with the message.

It was a good half hour before he came back and remarked, with a perfectly straight face, that the boy had gone. Meanwhile I'd been explaining to Miss Carnie how Anim Dass must have been disturbed by the discrepancy in his accounts and had come out to look for us and had been frightened when he found himself at the edge of the chimney, and had stumbled over the edge in the bad light.

She smiled at me without saying anything, and busied herself brewing some tea and toasting some of the biscuits they call scones over the stove. Arnold and I ate

WE WENT back to the camp in the grove and found it dark. After lighting the stove and a small lantern in the girl's tent she asked us to find Larry Dixon and tell him what had happened. Gordon was a little shaken by the fall of the overseer, still she did not make a wild fuss the way some women do when anything unpleasant has happened.

We found the captain on his cot in his tent which was at the other end of the line from Gordon's. Arnold and I shared one of the middle pair, and the other served as a combined dining and store shelter.

Dixon was there all right but completely useless.

"Whew!" Arnold sniffed several times. "Never knew Larry drank—like that!"

I flashed the electric torch in his face and shook him until he opened his eyes. They were sunk in the sockets and kind of glazed, and he went right back into a heavy sleep, breathing like a man under ether. The whole tent reeked of whisky, and of something else that I couldn't place. Carnie noticed it, too, and told me it was no use trying to rouse Dixon, for a while.

"I don't know if it's opium or hasheesh smoke that smells like that, Smithy," he whispered. "Someone put Larry out of commission."

It was hard to say whether the captain had been soaking up whisky or whether a liberal quantity of it had been poured around his cot. We looked at each other, and I saw that Arnold was worried for the first time. Up to now we youngsters had let Dixon do the worrying, and now that we had to act for ourselves we realized how much we had depended on him.

"He won't sleep it off before morning, Carnie," I pointed out. "The first thing is to put your sister to bed without letting

up all she had and said good night, betaking ourselves to the embers of the camp fire, which we stirred up to a good blaze. Here we could keep an eye on all the tents, and Moorcroft's portable house. I was hoping the doctor would show up because I wanted to ask him a few questions, but he failed to appear.

"I'd hate to hold a good poker hand against you, Carnie," I told him when my pipe was going good. "Your face is too good a bluff. I'd have sworn you were telling the truth about that boy."

He borrowed my tobacco pouch and filled his briar.

"I was, Smithy. The boy is gone. So are the bearers and all the other servants." After puffing until the pipe was going to his satisfaction he smiled. "Also Moorcroft's men have departed this place. Also, Dixon's Hindus have folded their tents and silently passed away. And the curious thing is that nothing seems to be stolen."

I thought this over for a while, looking from the dark bulk of the doctor's tent-house to the shrouded auto, and the line of empty shacks in the shadows under the trees. That evening, when we left to go after bears, about thirty natives had been quartered in the grove. Now, when I checked up, Arnold and myself were the only souls awake and able bodied and alive.

"Then this camp isn't what you might call thickly populated," I remarked. "Where did your men go?"

"Haven't the faintest idea, old chap."

"Why did they leave?"

"Ask the Hindu gods—they ought to know why two score dependable natives forsook a month's pay and a magnificent chance to loot." He bent forward to toss some more wood on the fire. "Frighten these Punjabi *budmashes* of mine a little and they just naturally steal whatever they can lay hand on. Afterward they confess and are forgiven and the stolen articles charged up to their pay."

"Meaning?"

"They must have been more than a little scared, Smithy. Hullo, whatever became of our two *shikars*?"

When we came to consider it, neither of us had seen the hunters after Anim Dass jumped down the chimney. Arnold had an explanation that fitted in pretty well with my theory. During our absence the hillmen from Chitral had visited the camp to stage a demonstration in revenge

for the felling of a tree in the sacred grove. They must have put our men to flight because Dixon had been dead to the world at the time. In fact the Chitrali crowd might have drugged him to keep him out of the way.



"Which brings us to Anim Dass," concluded Carnie. "Any ideas about that poor blighter, Smithy?"

I had several. Moorcroft, sane or insane, was trying his best to frighten us into leaving the grove. For what reason I didn't know, but that would keep. He was working with the Chitrali gang; the fact that he had been talking with them that morning proved he was in communication with them. The doctor had managed to scare Anim Dass stiff, and the *babu*, after finding Dixon laid neatly to sleep, had run after us.

"Good, Smithy!" nodded Carnie. "But how did he come to run off the *khud*?"

I didn't say anything because guessing isn't my long suit. I had seen a healthy man walk into a chasm that he knew was there. Outside of suicide, what explanation was there? And it was a cinch that Cobden and Anim Dass had not decided to commit suicide at the same spot within a couple of weeks.

"He acted as if he was drunk, Smithy."

"Maybe, but I don't think he was," I grunted, remembering that they had said that about Cobden, too.

"The wind might have made him lose his balance on the slope."

"Might have. There was no wind."

"But, confound it, Smithy, the undergrowth was rustling all around."

"Something was in it."

That left us about where we started. Neither of us had seen anything moving except Anim Dass. And I wasn't worrying about what we hadn't seen. Arnold was. He had a quick brain, better than mine, and he was as keen on this mystery as he had been for getting a deer the night before.

After a long while he spoke up.

"Smithy, only two explanations can possibly fit. Either the *babu* was so badly frightened he couldn't see what was in

front of him, or he thought that the cliff was level ground."

CHAPTER VII

A LAST WARNING

NEXT morning Captain Lawrence Dixon appeared long before we expected him, in a natty gray tweed suit, and shaved immaculately. His skin looked sallow and the pupils of his eyes were dark. After listening to all we had to say he nodded, thanked us very civilly, and asked which of us, in the absence of the native cooks, was inclined to prepare breakfast.

"You're a cool hand, Larry," cried Arnold. "What do you think of this mess and what are you going to do about it?"

"I never think before breakfast, young un," remarked the captain. "It's the rajah's doing of course. And equally of course we'll keep the flag flying. After you've prepared breakfast, Arnold, you take one rifle and post yourself beyond the wood where you can watch the Chitral trail. And, Smith, if you are game, you can go down into the gorge by the lower trail and try to bury what's left of Anim Dass."

He lit a cigarette and sat in a brown study while Arnold and I pitched in and brewed black coffee, fixed up eggs and toast and opened the tin of marmalade. We felt better after that, especially when Dixon took matters so easily. He knew how to encourage a couple of youngsters, and as I started down the zigzag trail that was the only path to the river I felt all my fears vanish. After all, one native had fallen off the cliff and the others had struck in a body. They did that in the U. S. of A.

But the matter of attending to Anim Dass temporarily ended all pleasant thoughts. For a while I battled the big vultures that were descending on him and finally had to heap some rocks over the poor devil and stick a rough cross over the pile.

By the time I reached the top of the cliff I was about all in, and it was early afternoon. Coming through the deodars I heard voices and slung the Enfield, muzzle forward, over my arm. Going on quietly, I made out that Gordon Carnie and Dixon were talking within a few yards of me, although the acacia bushes hid them.

"Larry," she cried, her voice rising, "it's

a foolish risk. I'll buy out your interest in the grove. Then you can satisfy your partners and we can leave."

His reply was too low to hear, but evidently he refused.

"If anything happened to Arnie or to the American we'd never forgive ourselves, Larry. You must let me buy the grove, and I'll leave the trees as they are."

Now I had not meant to listen in, but the girl's words halted me in my tracks. She seemed to be beside herself over something, and I gathered that it was because Larry would not abandon the grove. Also I learned that the Carnies had money, owned mines in South Africa and a rubber plantation in Sumatra, and when Arnold spoke of being broke he meant he had spent his income a good many months ahead.

"I'll send you and Arnie down to Simla in the car, Gordon," he said. "Smith can drive, I think. Moorcroft was correct enough in saying that this is not the place for you. If I'd suspected the rajah would try this kind of trickery I would never have——"

"Nonsense! You know we will not leave you."

He began to urge Gordon to go to a kind of mission hospital station about twenty miles away—the nearest thing to civilization, I suppose. And then he pleaded with her to go with him and be married there.

After a moment or two of this, with Dixon making love to her and the girl laughing and half crying I realized that this was not the place for Alexander Smith. I didn't want Larry Dixon to marry Gordon, or anyone else to marry the girl, for that matter, except me and that was impossible. And it didn't improve my humor to think of him standing there with her in his arms, and probably kissing her. He'd be a fool not to.

I looked all over for Arnold and finally found him in Moorcroft's den. He was sitting in the only chair with papers and books scattered all over the table, and he was flushed with excitement.

"Oh, I say, Smithy!" he hailed. "Here's a merry go! A cracking good find. I've been crammng since Larry called me in, and I've learned a lot about this place. There's a tomb somewhere in the grove."

I sat down on a tiger skin and got out my pipe, borrowing some of his tobacco and remarking that his news was old.

"Wait a bit, Yankee. This tomb was built by Jahangire, one of the great Moguls, about three centuries ago. And he buried one of his wives in it."

Carnie flourished a book at me, and grinned with excitement.



"It's all in Moorcroft's book on the relics of Mogul rule in Kashmir. He says

that the annals of Jahangire's reign relate that this queen was a beauty and a Persian, and he built the tomb underground in a grove of high deodars on the Wurdwan River. Afterward, the site was kept a secret, so that no blighters could tear the thing to pieces."

"Sure it's this grove?" I asked, becoming interested.

"This identical place. Moorcroft quotes a legend of the Chitral ruling family—about fourth cousins of the Mogul—to prove it is hidden under a pile of rocks."

"I've seen it, then." I thought of the clearing and the heap of boulders where Moorcroft had been standing.

"Ripping! We're getting to the meat of the mystery." He turned to the loose pages of manuscript. "I ventured to dig into Moorcroft's latest, unpublished as yet. Some of these sheets have an account of the inside of the vault—marble walls, mosaic floor, bearing the inscriptions—hm! Here we are! One portion of the floor is a solid square of silver, etched with designs by—and so forth. Gordon would like to see all this grandeur."

Arnold wanted to find Dixon and his sister and hurry off to the pile of rocks to find out if the account in the book was correct. But I cooled him off by reminding him that the place was really the rajah's property. Dixon had bought only the timber rights.

He admitted that Moorcroft said in the book that the Chitrali rulers stood in awe of the place and, although they were legal owners of the ground, never ventured into the tomb.

"That must be what Moorcroft meant when he said that some invisible force or other guarded this grove," I pointed out. "He probably was thinking of the spirit of the dead queen. Or maybe the Mogul scattered poison around to discourage trespassers."

"Rot!" Carnie laughed. "I thought you said Moorcroft was balmy—mad, you know."

"And he may be," I insisted. "But it stands to reason that *something* must have kept thieves out of the place for three hundred years, because the location of the tomb was known to the natives, and Moorcroft seems to have found it untouched."

I wanted to tell him what I'd heard in the grove, and to ask him if he knew Dixon was planning to marry his sister. Arnold did not seem to consider such a possibility. I suppose Gordon had had a whole platoon of suitors. He was studying me with a frown.

"You look done up, Smithy. Let's go and tell Larry, anyway."

I was beginning to feel tired and dead sleepy, for a fact. But I went with Carnie. Outside Dixon's tent we found the captain holding a small piece of paper. He handed it to Carnie, who passed it on to me. It said:

Dear Miss Carnie: If you have any regard for your brother or your own life, do not fail to take the car back to Simla and be out of the camp before sunset.

PAUL MOORCROFT.

But what held us all silent was the postscript, scribbled hastily under the neat writing of the message:

The snake will not be held back any longer.

This struck me as the warning of an insane man, who was not the less dangerous. Carnie could make nothing of it. Dixon observed that it had been folded and stuck in one of the sticks split at one end which are used by natives to carry messages. And it had been found on Miss Carnie's cot when they returned from their walk a few minutes ago.

"It means war, my dear fellows," he said grimly. "The rajah, I fancy, is inclined to make use of some of the mummery of his people, who may be snake worshippers. The cult of Nag, or the serpent, extends into the Himalayas."

"Yes," assented Carnie, "I remember my servant saying that no snake would harm you if you could see a particular snow peak among the higher ranges. Forget which one. A raid of cobras would be unpleasant, but not absolutely fatal."

A thought flashed into the thing that serves me for a brain and all my arteries felt several degrees cooler. Suppose a forty foot boa-constrictor was quartered under that heap of rocks, in the vaults? These reptiles lived to a ripe old age, I'd

heard somewhere, possibly a hundred years or so.

Also they climbed trees, and I could never forget the creepy feeling I'd had walking under the deodars for the first time. And then such a snake might have frightened Cobden and Anim Dass into fleeing too close to the edge of the cliff, and it would have caused the undergrowth to sway and rustle, although, in the poor light we had not seen it on the ground.

To tell the truth, though, I felt too sleepy to think much, and wandered off to my tent meaning to doze for an hour. The sun was warm on the canvas, and I'd been thirty-six hours without sleep.

I remember hearing Captain Dixon singing somewhere outside the tent, "It's a long way to Tipperary!" Then the singing stopped and I felt the tent and everything else slipping away. It was a pleasant feeling, too, until I began to walk under thousand-foot trees, every one with a great boa coiled in the branches. And Anim Dass was skipping around, grinning at me from behind the boles of the forest, with a hat made of vultures' wings.

The wings began to flap and then to hit me on the shoulder and Anim Dass was yelling something in my ear, calling to me to wake up. The worst of it was that I couldn't move, even when the wings turned into hands and fingers gripped into my arm.

"Mr. Smith, please wake up—please!"

My eyes opened and I saw the inside of the tent, only it was half hidden by a kind of veil. So I shut my eyes again and tried to shake off the hand that was bothering me. Then my forehead felt wet and cold, and I sat up with an effort.

Gordon Carnie was standing by the cot, with the miniature bit of embroidery she calls a handkerchief in her hand, dipping it into the water pail. The light was dim, the sun must have set; but I could see her cheeks were perfectly white. She was half smiling, with a kind of wild anxiety.

"Please say something, Mr. Smith. Whatever is the matter? You, and Arnie, too!"

It was not easy to say anything, I found, and I must have slept like a dead man for four hours. But that girl could have brought me out from a dose of ether, and when I understood that something had happened and that she was calling on me for help I got up. After emptying most of the water bucket over my head I was able to think straight and to walk without staggering.

The first thing I did was to feel around the cot for the Enfield that I had left there. Then I lit a lamp and searched the tent carefully while the girl watched me as if she did not know whether I was a cure or a turn for the worse.

The thing that brought me around finally was the rifle. The Enfield was gone. I asked if she had seen it or taken it and she shook her head.

"Larry might have taken it with him. He went to look at the Chitral trail two hours ago. Arnie was sleeping and so were you. I knew you were tired, but when Larry did not come back and it was growing dark I tried to wake my brother. I couldn't, and so——"

"You came for me." I thought of the state we'd found Dixon in, last night, and wondered if the same thing had happened to Arnold and me. There was no smell of whisky in the tent, but I felt as if I'd downed a quart or so in the last few hours. My hands shook, and my head was splitting.

Arnold was curled up on the ground by the dead fire, and his rifle was missing. His face was flushed and though his eyelids twitched when I rapped his fingers with a stick, his heavy breathing did not stop.

Finally I scratched a match and held the flame to his wrist. After a second I took it away and carried him into the tent, laying him on the cot.

That boy had been doped, and the same thing must have happened to me, though how it had been done was a mystery. I had not taken a drink, even of water, since coming to camp. Nor anything to eat, for that matter. I had been perfectly all right until we read over those books in Moorcroft's study.

I looked at Miss Carnie, and her lip was quivering. All at once a hot flame of rage swept over me. Moorcroft and his rajah had been trying to worry the heart out of this girl by their tricks. And things had gone far enough. They'd got away with our rifles, but I had a loaded revolver tucked in my inner coat pocket that they'd overlooked. And I made up my mind that someone was going to pay for this brand of black magic.



CHAPTER VIII

MOORCROFT MAKES A SUGGESTION

THE last glow of sunset hung over the mountain peaks across the gorge, and the wind had died away. The camp was in shadow, and the paths under the deadars were dark. It was very likely that we were being watched, and it would not do to take a light where we were going. Miss Carnie saw that I'd decided on some course of action and she followed me into the deeper gloom near the car.

"We'll go to the look-out, where Captain Dixon went," I whispered, "before the moon rises. After we've gained touch with him we'll come right back to your brother. He's safe enough for the present."

"I don't want to leave him."

Neither did I, but we couldn't carry him, and it was important to find out what had happened to Dixon. Although I did not tell her, we couldn't help Arnold much by hanging around; and by slipping away in the interval of darkness anyone spying on us would lose track of us.

"As a matter of fact," a man's voice remarked at my ear, "Carnie is perfectly safe where he is."

Dr. Moorcroft had come up somehow without being heard, and I could just make out his square, pale face in the gloom. He seemed to be alone. When I reached out and caught his arm he did not make a move to resist.

"What have you done to Arnold?" I asked.

"A little *datura* was put in his tobacco jar this morning, while you were all away from the camp."

"That is poison," said Gordon, a catch in her voice.

"In quantity, yes. Scattered grains mixed with tobacco merely produce overpowering drowsiness, in fact a stupor that lasts for some hours." Moorcroft might have been lecturing to a class. "My servants were instructed to doctor your tobacco, Smith, but apparently they were not successful. If you are coming with us this evening, I must have your word that you will not resort to violence, *no matter what happens.*"

"Guess again," I laughed. "I never felt more like violence in my life and I'll begin with you, if anything more starts happening."

For a moment we were all silent and I could hear the girl's quick breathing. Twilight is very short under those im-

mense heights and the afterglow had left the sky when Moorcroft spoke again.

"Miss Carnie, I had intended taking you with me alone tonight. You did not heed my warning to leave the grove. It is now too late. Your only chance is in coming with me to see the snake."

"What snake?" I asked.

"The one in the tomb. If you come and keep silence, I will do my utmost to guard you against the forces that are loosed within this grove at present."

"Where—where is—Captain Dixon?" I had never heard her speak of Dixon in such a hesitating way, but Moorcroft seemed to be able to read the girl's mind.

"He is unharmed at present, and you will see him before long." The man spoke as if he pitied the girl, and I wondered what had happened to Dixon. Probably he was a prisoner, in the hands of the Chitrali-Moorcroft-rajah party, although Miss Carnie had heard no shooting and the captain was not the sort of fellow to fall into a trap easily, or let himself be taken without using his gun.

"We will go to the tomb and be spectators of a time-honored ceremonial of the tribe—of the Chitralis," the doctor explained as if we were children. "Unfortunately the rajah is absent in Delhi, horse racing. If he were here, he would protect you, Miss Carnie."

The grove was pitch dark by then, and a hazy light was growing over the eastern peaks. The air felt colder all at once. In some way the place seemed to take shape and form around us.

Gordon drew a little closer to me, and I knew she felt the same way I did. It's hard to explain. Neither of us were subject to ordinary fear of barren places, or heights. It was the camp itself that set our nerves on edge, that shapeless pit of blackness under the giant trees, already sighing and rustling with a chilly breeze.

We both knew without being told that the camp was not deserted any more. Something else was there, besides Moorcroft and ourselves. An hour before we'd had trees around us and a stretch of grass and a few canvas shelters. Now the confounded place felt as if it had taken on life. It was just as if we'd walked out of a garden into someone else's house, only we had not moved at all.

"How did Anim Dass die?" I asked Moorcroft suddenly, certain that he knew.

And he did, because he laughed and said under his breath, "Come, and you'll learn for yourself."

There was nothing else to do. If I'd pulled my gun on Moorcroft and demanded that he tell us the truth of all this mystery, I don't think the man would have opened his lips. His warning sounded crazier than ever, but my brain was beginning slowly to register the fact that Moorcroft was not mad.

He knew where we could find Dixon, and he could hold back the Chitralis if he wanted to. Some of them were probably in the grove and they could jump us any time we made a false move, to say nothing of Arnold. The girl at my side seemed nearly mad with worry about the man she loved. So we followed Moorcroft along the dark path, my hand on the butt of the six-shooter. And for all the good it did me, I might as well have been carting along a mouse-trap.

THE moon had cleared the peaks by the time we reached the small clearing with the stone heap in the center. It looked differently by moonlight, and with a hundred or more natives squatting in a solid ring at the edge of the grass, in the shadows.

It was hard to see them clearly, but they wore some kind of peaked head-dress, and after glancing at us they kept their eyes on the heap of boulders. To enter that ring was like walking into a menagerie with all the animal cages open. I know I felt my nerves tingle all over, and Miss Carnie stood as straight as a deodar, and kept her chin up.

Moorcroft whispered to us not to speak, and signed for us to sit down by him halfway between the ring of Chitralis and the mass of stones. Right in front of us, twenty yards away, some of the biggest rocks had been moved aside, leaving a black hole about large enough for a man with a pack to crawl through. Taking away these boulders had not disturbed the others, so I guessed that hole led into a passageway, going down to the tomb. And once or twice I thought a glow of light came and went as if someone with a lantern was moving around below. But there was no mistaking the sudden feeling of danger that swept over us.

It wasn't the wind, either, that chilled me. A kind of electric shock twitched my arms and made my heart skip a beat. I tried to get up and found I could not move, and at the same time I stopped thinking.

The cold feeling of absolute fear passed away in a flash, leaving me too weak to lift a hand.

"Mr. Smith," Gordon whispered, "do you feel cold? I'm sure someone put a hand on my shoulder."

Now nothing had come near us. I noticed a shrill whining in the air, like the thin note of a violin, only this was immense and powerful as the shrill vibration that comes into the air when a hurricane is heading up. It was like wind, but the underbrush was still as the pews of a church. There was no wind stirring.

"Do not move, Miss Carnie, and do not go a step nearer the entrance to the tomb," Moorcroft whispered.

The whining was still in the air, which seemed to vibrate; but it was not sound, or anything moving. Sweat trickled down into my eyes, and I had to set my teeth, to keep from turning around and crawling away—anything to get outside that cursed circle and away from the thing that hung over us in the air.

All at once drums started pounding behind the circle.



The natives were beating a kind of tattoo. After a while the rhythm quickened and grew louder. Strangely enough it made me feel easier,

though it sounded very much like taps for us. Then two men walked into the circle, one carrying fruit, the other a bowl of milk. They set down the stuff in front of the hole and went back.

"You will see the snake now," Moorcroft muttered. "But you must not get up or speak."

The vibration in the air grew less, and finally died down to a faint hissing. By and by I realized that the sound came from the open mouth of the tomb. It was almost drowned by the beat of the drums.

"Watch!" whispered Moorcroft.

The hole became darker, then lighter, as a head appeared. The head drew back and I heard something sliding over rocks. Then a man crawled out.

Propping himself up over the bowl of milk and the fruit, he swayed his head from side to side like a snake, keeping time to the beat of the drums. At first I thought it was one of the Chitralis, going through some mummery connected with their show. And then I nearly yelled out loud.

It was Dixon. And while we watched,

his head suddenly sank down until the chin was on the ground. He began to wriggle, first around the bowl, then around the heap of stones. And he moved, not by his elbows as a man might, but by sliding his whole body along, as a snake moves.

I glanced at the girl beside me. She had seen Dixon—I knew that by her face—and now, mercifully, she had closed her eyes.

One look I had at the man's face. In the moonlight it seemed strangely loose and empty of expression. The full lips were drawn back and the eyes were narrowed to slits. Ordinarily Dixon was remarkably handsome, but now it made me shudder to see him. Because life itself seemed to have left him, and what we saw wriggling in the tall grass was no more than the body of a man, twisting in a kind of muscular strength.

I was thankful he had gone back of the stones, instead of toward us. For a moment he could be heard, moving away into the trees.

"This has gone far enough." I leaned back to whisper to Moorcroft, without being heard by Gordon Carnie. "That man was hypnotized."

"Yes," he nodded, "Dixon was a victim of group hypnotism, which is very well understood by the Chitralis. But it goes deeper than that. They have only stripped the mask from him—the mask, you know, of deceit. They have taken away from him his ability to control his face and his movements. What you saw was the man's true nature, devoid of every influence of civilization."

Curiously enough I thought of Dixon as Arnold and I had seen him twenty-four hours ago, asleep in his tent. His face had held a suggestion of brutishness then.

All at once the drums stopped, and I saw that the natives had disappeared. Miss Carnie stumbled to her feet and looked down at Moorcroft, and though she was shivering, her voice was like the swish of a sword.

"Kindly explain, everything, Dr. Moorcroft, at once."

He got up and bowed, and I'll swear there was admiration for her and pity, too, in his manner.

"Come, Miss Carnie. We can do so safely, now."

Without looking around he walked to the hole, stooped and climbed through. A match flashed and I saw that he was lighting a candle. The hole was at the head of a narrow passage, and several big

boulders had been propped over it, to hold up the loose stones above.

She followed him in at once and they started down a flight of stone steps, bending over because the passage was hardly large enough for a dwarf. I had to scramble down on heels and hands, but after what had happened I was not going to let the girl out of my sight.

The stair descended a dozen feet or so and ended in a square chamber with walls of dark sandstone and a teakwood door at one side. This was open, and we followed Moorcroft through. I've wondered afterward why we ventured down into the tomb; but Miss Carnie was not in the mood to stop at anything and I never thought of trying to stop her.

CHAPTER IX

THE EMERALD CASKET

INSIDE the door we all halted and looked down. Another narrow stair, this time of marble, ran from our feet to the floor of the mausoleum itself. A lantern stood near the center, with Dixon's rifle; or rather the one he had borrowed from me, beside it.

The air was cold, but reasonably fresh, due to the door being left open. And the place itself was a treasure chamber, like a stage setting. The walls were a mass of mosaics, of some shining stone. Moorcroft explained that they were made of onyx and jasper, and the green in them was jade. And these stone pictures on the walls were a replica of the forest over our heads—slender trees with triangular, green leaves, and patterns of vines running through them.

Even the slender columns that supported the red sandstone roof were shaped like cedars, with branches spreading out at the top and running into the sandstone. The carving on the pillars was a work of art and each one, probably would have sold for ten thousand dollars on Fifth Avenue or Post Street.

Moorcroft pointed out everything, explaining that the builder, Jahangire the Mogul chap, had tried to make this tomb of a favorite immune from the wear of time. The precious stones were bright as ever, and the marble floor was polished. But water had seeped through here and there, and places in the walls were crumpled in by roots of the deodars that had grown into the tomb.

He said the entrance had been covered up by the loose rocks to prevent discovery.

But a thing like this is not forgotten. And though the Chitralis, from whom Moorcroft learned the secret, kept its site hidden as well as they could, many natives in India knew about it.

"For three hundred years no robber dared to enter here," the doctor remarked. "But look at that!"

Across the chamber the floor was a square of solid silver, and around this ran a lacy screen, clear to the ceiling. By holding the lantern close to the openings in the carved screen we could see a kind of altar inside, with a small casket on it. This box was set with precious stones, mostly emeralds I expect.



In that casket, Moorcroft told us, rested the ashes of the Persian girl the Mogul had loved. And the marble screen—the thing was really carved out of marble—was shattered at one place by a small blacksmith's hammer, that lay near where we stood.

It did not need a diagram to show that Dixon had been at work smashing the barrier between him and the casket when he had been interrupted. Miss Carnie looked as if someone had struck her, but she faced Moorcroft frankly and asked him to tell his story.

DR. MOORCROFT had known Lawrence Dixon for several years, since the captain had resigned from the army. Dixon had been posted in the Kashmir region, doing work with the border commission. While he was a subaltern he had mixed with the wealthier natives a lot and had taken to eating opium. He had always been a drinker, and his promotion was due to influence.

Why the man had resigned, Moorcroft did not say, but it came out afterward that he had been involved in smuggling opium into Russia.

Besides opium Dixon had dabbled more than was good for him in the mysteries of the Hindus. He had followers in nearly every caste because the man had a keen mind and knew how to make a penny turn up when he wanted it. When the rajah of Chitral, Babur el-Sulaiman, had been in need of money in Delhi, a few months

ago, Dixon offered to buy out the hill chief's feudal rights to cut timber.

He got the concession cheap, for some six thousand pounds. But to buy the timber he had to interest two or three other men in the forestry venture. These people in Calcutta supplied most of the six thousand pounds, and stipulated that Cobden should be made manager. Cobden was notoriously honest, though quarrelsome, and an experienced lumber man.

About the actual terms of the partnership Moorcroft knew little. Dixon was content to take a small percentage for his services because he meant to make his profit in a different thing, the tomb of Jahangir.

He knew the site of the tomb must be close to this spot, having learned that much from his native friends, but knew also that the Chitralis kept a close watch on it. The timber cutting gave him an excuse to go over every foot of the ground. Taking the sacred grove as a starting point, he found the entrance in the rock pile quickly.

The man was not afraid to take long chances. Still, breaking into the mausoleum would require the help of another white man and armed followers. Dixon had an idea of the wealth buried in the tomb, and he made his first mistake by trying to win over Cobden to help him make the raid. A man venturing into the vault alone would be at the mercy of the Chitralis who would probably gather outside and shut him up in the place—so Dixon must have reasoned.

Anyway, Cobden refused to meddle, and accused Dixon of ruining the timber concession by an act of plain thievery. The tomb belonged to the rajah, the trees to the Englishman, who had made a good bargain.

Whether Cobden threatened to reveal Dixon's plans to the other partners, Moorcroft did not know. But Dixon asked one of his followers, Anim Dass, to get the manager out of the way for several weeks—carry him off to one of the unruly hill tribes or see that he fell sick. Now Anim Dass did not believe in taking any unnecessary trouble, and while Dixon was absent in Delhi, waiting for the field to be cleared, the *babu* proceeded to kill Cobden—which was the safest thing to do from his point of view.

And he did it cleverly. A cobra was brought up from one of the southern valleys and was slipped into the manager's overcoat by one of the natives who could

handle the deadly snake. Cobden was bitten before he was aware of danger, in the half light of sunrise near the edge of the cliff.

A cobra's bite does not always kill, but Anim Dass had his species of reptile selected with care, and Cobden saw what had struck him; he knew, too, that he was a couple of miles from medicines and stimulants at the camp—and did not care to die under the eyes of the natives who had tricked him. He walked off the cliff.

Which suited Anim Dass perfectly, because a half dozen witnesses could say that the white man died by accident.

Meanwhile Dixon had met Gordon Carnie at the races in Delhi. Moorcroft found out that he was paying attention to the girl. Miss Carnie's parents were dead and both she and her brother disliked the perfunctory care-taking of the officers' wives; Dixon's history was not known in Delhi, and—that was all Moorcroft said of the love that the girl had wasted on the man who had tried to marry her for her money. But I knew pretty well what he left unsaid. Dixon, playing for a greater stake than the Chitralis tomb, had persuaded Gordon Carnie and her brother to come to the hills to his camp. Then he tried to induce her to go with him in the car to the missionary to be married.

The girl was barely out of school, wilful and heedless as her brother, hardly out of the flapper stage. Yet a woman's instinct warned her to hold back from this final step. I think Dixon tried to play the sheik and rush her off, and failed. Anyway, the talk that afternoon gave her an insight into his character, and the conjuring of the natives, horrible as it was, did the rest.

Even then I didn't quite believe that the Chitralis had turned Dixon into a human snake by collective thought-action. Probably the man had been tricked, or drugged, and was trying to crawl away without being seen.

"You haven't explained yet how Anim Dass died," I reminded Moorcroft. In spite of the man's open story and its effect on the girl I was not quite sure in my mind what part he was playing.

"He followed Cobden," retorted the doctor grimly. "Last night when Dixon was sleeping in his tent, the *babu* took alarm, suspecting the truth. He had an inkling that the Chitralis had decided on his death as a punishment for the murder of the white man, which they witnessed."

Moorcroft took up the hammer and

glanced at it thoughtfully. "Anim Dass was aware of the secret of the tomb. He came to me last night, and, being thoroughly frightened, confessed a good deal, trying to lay all the blame on Dixon. I could do nothing for him. After I'd left the camp to go to the tribe and try to make them keep their hands off you, Smith, and the Carnies, Anim Dass ran to find Arnold



Carnie. He was creeping through the underbrush when he put his hand on a cobra."

"Accident?"

"No. The Chitralis caught him after they'd seen him barging around the stone heap, yesterday. He was petrified by terror and half numb with the poison that kills in a half hour, when he reached the edge of the cliff where you were. Probably he was more than half blind by then, and stumbled off. It made no difference."

Suddenly he stopped and looked at Gordon Carnie. There were dark circles under her eyes, and her teeth were caught in her lower lip.

"Why did you keep silent so long, Dr. Moorcroft? You are Lawrence's enemy, and I do not believe what you say. Why won't you accuse him to his face?"

She was defiant and bitterly hurt. I suppose a woman is a poor judge of character in the man she loves or likes, and law doesn't mean the world to her either. But I saw her wince as she looked at the break in that beautiful screen built by a prince generations ago to guard the remains of the woman he had cherished.

"I'm going to find Lawrence and make him answer you," she added, lifting her chin in a way that meant business.

A breath of cold air passed through the tomb, blowing out the candle and making the lantern flicker. Moorcroft held up his hand, listening, and I set myself for some new kind of magic.

"The wind is rising," he said.

We left the tomb, and I had no regrets when he closed the door after us and crawled out the hole. Behind that screen was a fortune in jewels and a few whacks of the hammer might have made it mine, because I was armed, and Moorcroft

wasn't, and the Chitralis had left us—evidently trusting the doctor, who had been there before.

But when I thought of Dixon and his snake wriggle, and the things I might be made to look like if I tried to crack that crib, I walked out on my toes and helped Moorcroft roll the boulders back into place. Outside, a merry gale was blowing and the deodars were swaying overhead. The moon had gone behind clouds and it sure looked good for a storm.

So Moorcroft thought, and we hurried the girl to his trick tent, as the best shelter available. Those Himalaya thunderstorms are no dewy showers.

CHAPTER X

THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF

WE WERE caught by the first burst of rain in the clearing and by the time we staggered in through the entrance of the big tent our clothes were soggy with water. The tent was dark, Moorcroft's servants being still A. W. O. L., and he felt his way into the study to the lamp that stood on his desk, while I put down the rifle and went after him for a rag, to wipe it off.

Out of the darkness a match flared up and someone else lighted the lamp. It was Larry Dixon, and when he put the shade in place and turned toward us I saw two of his natives squatted against the side of the partition. They were all spattered a bit with rain, so I guessed they had just arrived.

"Where's dear Arnold?" smiled Dixon.

If ever a man seemed worked up to tear things wide open Dixon was that man. His sunken eyes smoldered and twitched and two red spots burned in his cheeks. He may have had a shot of his favorite stuff, opium or *bhang*, but the loose folds of skin about his mouth and his puckered lips were traces of the experience he'd come through. The mask was off his face, to stay off.

"I've precious little time to waste on you two," he snarled. "Where's that cub?"

"He is not here," responded Moorcroft calmly, wiping the water off his glasses.

"That's a lie! You've hounded me enough, Moorcroft. Now you're coming with me to the tomb in the grove and if your cursed Chitralis try any more trickery, you'll be the one to suffer."

"Precisely," nodded the little doctor.

"And you. No man could break into the screen and come out alive."

How much Dixon remembered of his experience I don't know, but it couldn't have been much. Just then I heard Gordon's step behind me, and her voice.

"Captain Dixon! Is it true that you ordered Anim Dass to put Mr. Cobden out of the way?"

The one thing that hurt her most was that he should have had a native for a sidekick. His eyes half closed and his teeth clicked shut. What he would have said I don't know, and Gordon, after a look at his face, was past caring by then. It was the little doctor who laid all cards on the table, after a quick glance at Dixon.

Moorcroft rummaged in the mess Arnold had made of his papers and drew out a small slip with a few words scribbled on it.

"Just a minute," he said gravely. "Miss Carnie perhaps will believe this now. I hope it will save her from a heartless scoundrel. And it may prove to be a timely bit of news for you, Dixon."

It was a telegram, dated three days ago, which ran:

YOUR ADVICE AS TO CHITRAL SITUATION RECEIVED. IT IS URGENTLY IMPORTANT THAT THE TOMB AND ITS GROVE SHOULD NOT BE MOLESTED. THEY ARE UNQUESTIONABLY THE PROPERTY OF THE RAJAH BABUR EL-SULAIMAN. FRIENDSHIP OF HILL TRIBES AT STAKE. CALCUTTA PARTNERS OF TIMBER ENTERPRISE COMING TO TAKE OVER. C. I. D. SENDING REPRESENTATIVE TO ARREST DIXON, WHO IS BELIEVED TO BE HEAD OF GANG OF NATIVE THIEVES DELHI.

The telegram was addressed to Moorcroft, and signed by the Resident of Kashmir. C. I. D. stood for the Criminal Investigation Department.

"Apparently, Dixon," went on the doctor quietly, "your precious pair of conjurers who robbed Mr. Smith at the hotel are not your only servants. Did you want his money or his papers?"

One of the breaks in the storm came just then, and we could hear the rumble of the river down below, and the snapping of the canvas under the gale. I heard something more, the sputtering roar of a motor with cut-out open a considerable distance off. Dixon caught it, too.

He had been glaring at Moorcroft, his lips moving in a kind of whisper. Until now there had been nothing against him but Moorcroft's suspicions—and the tale

of Anim Dass who was dead, so that didn't count. Seeing that telegram, however, and realizing that he was being tracked down roused the devil in him.

There was a way out for him and his quick brain grasped it before I did. With a snarl he jerked a revolver out of his belt and fired at Moorcroft. The slender man went down as if his legs had been pulled out from under him. And Dixon had the gun pulled down on me before I'd got mine out from its sling. Miss Carnie saved me that time, by stepping between us and Dixon snapped something at the two natives that sounded like:

"Missy-sahib, lao!"

They were on their feet and caught her by the arms, hauling her to one side, while she struggled to win free, calling Dixon a coward, which he wasn't, exactly, whatever else he might have been.

"I'll have use for you, Gordon," he muttered, watching for a chance to wing me. "A hostage, across the frontier—Miss Carnie, you know—worth a few hundred pounds, what? Ah, Smith!"

When the girl was pulled to one side we both shot, almost together, and both of us missed. I had stepped back as I pulled the trigger, into the next compartment, which was dark. One of the Hindus had been pulling a knife, to throw it, and I wanted to shift to new ground.

The minute I reached the waiting room the lamp in the study was blown out. I listened and heard nothing at all until Gordon called out clearly.

"They will kill you, in the tent, Mr. Smith. Go to Arn——"

Somebody cut her off but her advice was good. I slipped out the front entrance a short ways and knelt down, trying to watch



the black square of the opening against the gray blurr of the wind-whipped walls. Then came a flash of lightning and I saw Dixon walking toward me, his gun poised.

We shot so close together that it was impossible to hear my bullet strike. My coat jerked and something cold as ice grazed the tender skin over a rib.

That bird could shoot, and I changed po-

sition again, waiting for the next display of lightning, and getting madder all the time.

When the flash came I was looking toward the tent, and I glimpsed one of the natives crawling along the ground, knife in hand. I pulled down on him and heard the bullet strike this time, just before Dixon's gun barked and a weight landed on my right forearm, and every nerve in me turned around a few times.

That jar and the crack that followed it told me a bone in the arm was out of commission. I took the revolver in my left hand and crawled to one side. A couple of dim flashes, high up in the clouds showed me that Dixon was coming forward again. I heard him laugh and knew that he'd seen something to his liking.

"I doubt if you'll have as much burial as Anim Dass, Mr. Smith," he whispered.

I knew better than to risk a shot at the sound, with the gun in my left hand. The pain in my right arm was beginning to make me dizzy, and I figured the edge of the cliff must be close behind me. Dixon must have seen it. The lightning had suspended operations, but the clouds were drifting away and the moonlight was growing stronger all the time.

Dixon's figure began to take shape, a few paces away, and I nerved myself for another shot, knowing it might be my last, and praying that it would do enough damage to keep him from carrying off the girl. The wind was whining in the brush, and the air seemed to vibrate with it, when the last clouds rolled away from the moon.

I had Dixon along the sights, but I never pulled the trigger. His arm was swaying in front of him and his face was turned up to the sky. Behind him, and all around the clearing, I saw a throng of turbaned natives squatting—all except one man.

He was an old man. His thin arms were lifted over his head and he was looking up into the silvery space over the jutting heights around us. I could see jewels gleam in his turban, and his long cloak made him look like some kind of a priest. Somewhere in the grove a drum was booming, and the beat of it kept time with the roaring of blood in my ears.

Dixon's arm jerked spasmodically and the revolver dropped from his fingers. He half turned as if trying to run out of the semi-circle of squatting figures. Then he cried out and caught at his throat.

The old man pointed out over the valley, and I shivered. The same force that

had disarmed Dixon was driving him away from me toward the edge of the precipice. I could see all the Chitralis looking at him and then, pushing back and struggling as if a resistless wind was driving him ahead, Dixon stumbled to the edge of the cliff. Flinging up his arms he dropped out of sight.

I must have been more than a little faint, because a half dozen moons seemed to come down from the sky and dance around the clearing. When they went away the old man and his tribe had gone and Miss Carnie was standing in the tent entrance calling me anxiously.

In the study I found Dr. Moorcroft calmly bandaging up his right chest, where Dixon's bullet had ripped through.

"Hullo Smith! The rajah of Chitrali was just here—motored up from Delhi to see what the trouble was. Said you'd drop in presently. Fine old specimen, isn't he?"

With a glance at my arm, he pulled off my coat and shook his head. His injury prevented his setting the broken bone and he said cheerfully that he'd have to send me down to the nearest army post to be patched up by a surgeon. All at once he smiled.

"Understand anything of native customs now, Smith? Or are you still wishful to go up against the occult power of a whole people with a revolver in your hand?"

"I won't meddle, thank you," I told him.

He was a strange fellow. Becoming serious, he stared at me thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Smith, I fancy your meddling saved me my life and Miss Carnie an extremely unpleasant ordeal—to say nothing of her brother."

"Tell me just one thing, Dr. Moorcroft,"

I begged. "What was the idea of the native who raided my berth and brandished a knife in my ear on the train? Was that Dixon's doing?"

"No," he smiled, "mine. The chap was one of my servants, and I felt confident that the incident would discourage you from getting into further trouble. I was wrong."

He told me that he was worried about Gordon Carnie. The girl was about at the end of her rope, with a fever that might develop in her brain. She was determined to leave the grove at once. Moor-

croft agreed that she ought to be taken down to the hill settlement at Simla or some such place, and out of these surroundings.

Just then we were hailed from the entrance. There stood Arnold Carnie, my rifle in hand, blinking like a sleepy owl. We had a laugh out of that and it did us good. When we gave him a sketch of what had happened he was indignant.

"Why in thunder didn't you blighters wake me up? Smith, it wasn't a bit fair. You got the first buck, and all the fighting."

I cheered him up a little by showing him how to get the water out of that fool carburetor in the car, by warming up the motor. After that he bundled up his sister and stowed her in the rear seat, while I took the wheel. Arnold wasn't much of a hand at driving, and it was up to me to coax that bus about a hundred miles to civilization.

And it was a whale of a ride down that muddy mountain trail, over the rock bridges and around washouts, with the prospect of skidding after Anim Dass and Dixon if the brakes were put on too suddenly—and with only one hand to manage the wheel and the gears. The sun came up and the mist rolled around us like a sea. Miles overhead the sun gleamed on the snow of the mountains we were leaving.

Yes, it was a morning for the gods, and a ride of rides. By the time we reached the first bungalows and the buffalo carts and palms' Gordon Carnie was sleeping in her brother's arms and we knew that the danger of brain fever was past. When we stopped I felt sorry that it was over.

IT'S A dusty morning in May, and the street cars are raising a steady bedlam on Woodward. There's a glint of green out where Belle Isle is, and the sun is warm on the pavements. I saw a straw hat today, and the windows are opened at last.

There's a letter from Arnold Carnie in the mail, asking me to come out for a summer's shooting in the high hill country, north of Kashmir, and he promises real game this time. I can't afford to go and maybe I ought to stay sitting at the desk, but by thunder I'm going.

When the red gods call a fellow, he takes the next train out, or feels sorry the rest of his life. What are the red gods? Well, some say the hunting call; others, wanderlust. But I'm through trying to explain things.





BUSH LEAGUE STRATEGY

By H. M. SUTHERLAND

AS A BATTER, BUSTER STUBBS WAS THE OLD PILE-DRIVER AND AS A THIRD SACKER HE WAS WIDE, FAST AND SURE. THE TROUBLE WAS HIS HEAD DIDN'T WORK AS WELL AS HIS FEET. BUT WHEN HE DID GET THAT IDEA, IT WAS DYNAMITE FOR ALL!

BULL luck, that's what I call it and, after ten years managing teams in six different leagues, I think I ought to know. Strategy, huh! Say, I've pulled that stuff and got yards of fulsome praise on every sport sheet in town; and then on the next day I'd try the same stunt and it'd fail to work. What happened? Those same boys who had strewed my path with roses on the day before, now stood unanimous for my immediate departure—if it could be taken for granted that I had enough brains to be able to locate the railroad station. Strategy is strategy when it works; when it don't then it's an excess cargo of ivory, of triple-plated imbecility where baseball intelligence is supposed to lurk.

I'm guiding the destinies of a gang of dock-wallopers and sandlot alumni not so long ago but what I can still remember it without forgetting any of the important details, when I run slap bang into some of that bull luck strategy which for a few minutes had me standing on my left ear and feeling about as useless as a Mexican hairless pup on a polar expedition.

The season had already got under way when I agreed to Old Man Gries's terms to manage the Tars which for the last two years had followed the national example and stayed in the cellar. I hadn't been there long before I found out why they

were called Tars—they never moved until the weather got hot and then they didn't break any tendons. I knew most of them, had played with them at some time or other about twenty years before. They were castoffs from the big leagues and they had reached their last resting place before they became night watchmen.

I raised a howl to Gries, but his heart was bigger than his pocketbook and throughout the year those old birds stuck closer to him than a mud turtle to a pick-aninny's toe. However, I did manage to loosen the Old Man out of enough change to bring in four pretty good youngsters, three for the infield and one for the pastures; and later I picked up a couple of sidewinders which called themselves pitchers. Then I got busy and tried to teach those burr-heels this thing they call baseball strategy.

I might as well have tried to instruct a stuck pig in a business college. They forgot everything I told them as soon as I shut my mouth. All those youngsters knew was to hit the ball and run; but I've got to hand it to them, they could do that little thing as good as a lot of bozoes who are drawing down twenty-six times as much cash. With the old boys as a sort of a foundation I gradually built up a machine that hit on nearly all of its cylinders at least part of the time.

To the surprise of everybody including

me and Old Man Gries, the Tars started in to win games right along. In a month they jumped from seventh to third place and the papers and sports writers began to take notice. The impossible had happened! The millenium had arrived! Oh, they didn't put it in so many words, but at least they left that impression.

The boys kept on plugging along, winning four or five every week, and each day the crowds on the home grounds increased a little. Old Man Gries came into the dug-out one Saturday and sat down beside me. We were playing the Lions, who were in second place and nipping the heels of the Governors from the state capitol, the perennial winners of the pennant.

The Tars were stepping high, wide and fancy that afternoon. "Shoestring" McMahon, one of my kid pitchers, had Thurston magic on the ball, and the Lions were dislocating their spinal columns trying to reach his weird shoots. Down on second Chet Kavanaugh was doing Frankie Frischs and Rogers Hornsbys all over the lot with the crowd on its composite toes yelling so loud for him that they would have made an Apache Indian back up into his teepee.

"Look at that crowd!" says Old Man Gries, surveying the grandstand with a grin which, if it had been any wider, they would have had to move back his ears.

"Look at that ball team!" I shoots back at him. "That's what brought your crowd out." But he couldn't see anything but the gate receipts. For the first time in the Tars' history they seemed to be getting out of the "stretch-penny" class.

Finally Kavanaugh pulled a bare-hand stop over the bag that brought even the boss to his feet and he forgot the crowd for a minute. "Wild Cat" Marvin, the yowling third sacker, pulled a match for Chet's play and, to top it off, Old Wiggins in right field showed unusual speed and pulled down what looked like a certain three base hit.

"How did you do it?" queried the Old Man, beaming on me like I was a prospective millionaire son-in-law. "We've never had a team to play like that before."

"Of course not," I replies loftily. "They're playing baseball and not one-old-

cat. They've been taught teamwork and strategy. That's what does the trick—strategy. Watch this play now!"

Hart, the first man up, had singled, and Kavanaugh was at bat. I signaled for the hit and run on the second ball. At the motion of the pitcher Hart was off like a jackrabbit and Kavanaugh met the ball for a low liner between third and short so hot neither of them had time to get out of his tracks before the leather marble was in the outfield. Hart came to third before the fielder got his hands on the ball and, when he juggled it for an instant, took a long dive for the platter. He made it clean.

"That's what I mean," says I in a complacent tone, grinning at Old Man Gries. "That's what wins the old ball games and that's what's going to bring in the first flag the Tars ever won."

"If you do it," declares the Old Man, "I'll give a five years' contract and add two thou to your pay check."

From that minute on, waking or sleeping, my ideas were single-tracked on one purpose—the pennant. Also from that minute on it began to look like Lady Luck wasn't particularly wild about my style. Still she flirted around, keeping me in hopes and keeping the whole situation uncertain before she decided to make up her mind one way or the other.

We closed our home engagement that afternoon by holding the Lions to two runs while the boys collected a natural seven. Then that night we hit the road for a couple of weeks in which we were lined up soft against the cellarites and their boon companions on the bottom rungs. The first week we cleaned up and went into second place and, by winning the first two games from the Lions the second week, we started pushing the league leaders, the Governors.

Right then Lady Luck arose and begat herself hence, deserting me cold, and for the next month I had enough troubles to make the Book of Job read like Pollyanna. In the first place Shoestring McMahon went out somewhere and got himself full of typhoid fever; and two days later Kavanaugh caught his toe in the bag strap and tore a tendon loose in his ankle which, the doctor said, would keep him on crutches for a month at least. I had to run in one of my old reliables from the bench to take his place and that bird was so slow you'd think he kept his engine in reverse all the time.

When we got back home for a few



weeks' stay I was feeling so darned gloomy I didn't care much what else happened, until it did. That same night Wild Cat Marvin picked out the only corner in town on which any sort of an accident happened and stood there long enough for a fire engine to skid and knock him for a row of brick boarding-houses. When he came to he had a special nurse and a busted leg. That capped the amazing climax, and, outside of a few charley horses among the has-beens, split fingers, marriages, and one case of paralysis, that was all I had to worry about right in the middle of a hot race for the flag.

My line-up after that looked like the sick call in an old soldiers' home. There wasn't enough life in the outfit to start an argument with the umpire, let alone win a ball game. Hart at short did nobly and covered miles of territory, but he was human; he couldn't get over to third and take the throw at second at the same time. Duffus on first was as steady as a deacon and between these two the infield's ragged edges were held together in a way, but the holes were large enough to permit several games to slip out of our fingers.

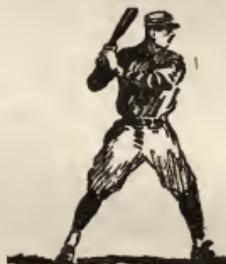
I had only three pitchers left and they worked alternately, which is at least one day too soon for any man I ever had under me. But what else could I do? Old Man Gries was as tight as a one-piece bathing suit and all the money I could get out of him wouldn't keep a one-legged man in dancing pumps. We started to slide down the ladder and I saw that contract and the two thou raise slipping over the dark blue horizon. We were still in second place, but the Lions were closing the gap like a thoroughbred behind a bunch of selling platers.

August eased up on us before we realized it and the Lions loped by us after taking three in a row from us on our home lot. The sports boys began to rise up on their hind legs and howl that the Tars must get new blood injected. From the general trend of their articles I saw that the new blood they wanted was mine. Old Man Gries let fall several sarcastic remarks about "strategy"; but if he couldn't tell the difference between "strategy" and "tragedy," I wasn't going to get a blackboard and chalk and draw a diagram of it for him.

One day we were playing the Grays; at least it had been scheduled for a ball game; but I had long since decided that it was an endurance contest to see who could hold up the play longer and then do less when

they got out on the field. It was as hot as hell in summer and I had been dividing my attention between the men and the water cooler when someone in street clothes came into the dugout and sat down beside me. It was Jess Walters, one of the old-timers whom I had sent out to the sandlots and little country towns nearby to look over the ground and see if he could pick up any promising young players. I didn't expect him to locate any material, but had found that the best way of getting rid of him.

I was busy watching the Grays' sluggers, who ordinarily couldn't hit the Mississippi



River with a paddle, slam my best hurler for six safeties in succession, and I forgot all about Jess. When the agony of that inning was finally over he was still sitting there and I could see with both eyes shut that he

was chuck full of eagerness and excitement about something and was doing his darndest to keep it hid.

I kinder felt sorry for Old Jess. He seemed so anxious to make good in his new job as my scout, for he realized that I knew he was too old and stiff for anything else. And to think that only a few years before Jess was a .340 hitter on the Cubs and the "idol of the fans." Now he was digging up youngsters for a bush team at a salary which wouldn't have bought his cigars when he was a big leaguer.

"How are they comin', Hank?" he asks trying to appear natural.

"Rotten. What's on your mind?"

Jess moved over and lowered his tones so that the others on the bench couldn't hear.

"Hank, I've found him."

"Him?" I didn't understand what he was driving at. "Who is him?"

"The phenom—the Cobb—the Babe of the bushes. You wanted me to find you a ball player. Well, I told you I've discovered him."

"So?" I wasn't particularly interested. Jess meant all right, but he is one of those birds who gets enthusiastic about anything once and never gives it a rest 'til he kills it.

"You ain't got nothin' to do tomorrer," pleads Jess. "Le's run up and take a look at him. We'll get back by dark."

"Come up to the hotel tonight and tell me about it."

There didn't seem to be any other way of getting rid of him then, and I didn't want to throw that game away even if there was a baseball superman ready to be pulled off the bushes. The boys started a slugging bee in the eighth and tied the score, but a round robin of rotten fielding lost the game in the ninth, putting us another notch behind the Lions. I went home feeling about as cheerful as a smallpox ward. The only good news I'd heard in a week was that Kavanaugh's ankle was mending fast and that in another week he'd be able to get back on second and stop up that gap which had been bringing me gray hairs.

I had forgotten about Jess until I saw him stray into the lobby after dinner. I tried to duck into the elevator, but it was no go, so I led the way into a corner and gave him a cigar.

"Well, let's hear about this 'discovery' you made," I radioed. Already I was figuring on some excuse to get out of that trip the next day because I had other plans.

"He's a murderin', hittin' fool," enthused Jess. "Name's Stubbs—Vernoy Stubbs. He plays on a team for a brick-makin' company, Saturdays and Sundays, up at Nottoway. I've seen him play twice and, take it from me, Hank, you won't make no mistake in signin' him quick."

"What does he play?" Not that I cared, but it was the only question I could think of at the time.

"Third. And he covers acres, fast on his pins. And throw! Say, that bird can put 'em all day in a quart cup."

I let Jess rave for a while 'til he got it all out of his system and then I took a hand in the conversation.

"Let's come down to cases, Jess. You and I've seen good men play and we know the makings when we see 'em. Is this bird any good? I mean by that, is he good enough to hit the alleged pitchers in this league? Oh, I know he could hit on that brickyard team, but honestly, Jess, do you think down in your heart that Jackson of the Governors couldn't make a monkey of him? I've reached the limit on the payroll and, unless he's some unusual, I can't afford to gallivant around and take on bush wonders for a pastime."

Jess laid his hand solemnly on my knee. "I've been tellin' you the honest truth, Hank," he declared solemnly. "I believe he is a wonder."

That settled it. I knew Old Jess wouldn't deliberately lie about it, but I still didn't have much confidence in the ability of that busher. However, I was needing a third baseman bad. Marvin wasn't going to be able to get back in harness for the rest of the season, and Grimes, my cast-off sub, let 'em go through him like the spirit of the Lord through an Alabama camp meeting. I believe that if this Stubbs had been playing in any other position, I would have sat tight and let him stay in the brickyard.

The Tars's home town was as dead as Williamsburg, Va., on Sunday anyway, and since we couldn't play because of a recently passed city ordinance, I chased along up to Nottoway with Jess. It took about four hours to go that forty miles on a dinky, two-coach train which stopped at every other farmhouse. When we finally hit Nottoway I couldn't see anything but a brickyard. Jess led the way to a boarding-house where we got a greasy dinner for four bits. Then we hiked it out to the ball grounds, which was part of the brickyard.

The game hadn't started when we got there, but we didn't have long to wait. Another team from somewhere nearby had the field for practice, and they were pretty bad. They could hit and throw, but it was a fifty-fifty shot whether they got their hands on a batted ball or not; and even if they did it was another even bet that they would manhandle it around long enough for the batter to land on first. Then the brick-makers come on for their warm-up. They were a motley gang, among them one kid of about fifteen and a couple of geezers with whiskers. They were even worse than the other team.

"Which is it?" I asked as they lined up to bat out a few.

"The one in the red flannel undershirt," replied Jess.

I looked him over. He was about nineteen, tall and gangly, looking like he hadn't ever got enough to eat. His arms were long, hanging down almost to his knees, and when he moved, you naturally expected him to fall over his feet, he was that awkward. A sort of a loose smile stuck on his face like it was glued there but liable to drop off at any instant, and a large quid puffed out one cheek, making his whole face look kinder lop-sided. But under that red understirt I could see the play of a set of powerful muscles, and he swung a couple of bats around his head like they were dumbbells.

When it came his turn to hit he stepped up alongside the plate and stood there with his feet wide apart and that big club of his resting on his shoulder. "That bozo hit," says I to myself. "Why he couldn't get his bat off his shoulder before a fast shoot would be in the catcher's glove! No man ever stood at the plate in the manner he did and hit a real pitcher." I started to give Jess the razz for bringing me up forty miles from nowhere to see a athletic mishap accidentally knock the cover off a



pitcher a kid could land on when he wanted to. But just then the warm-up man shot the ball across with more speed than he had been feeding to the others, and I thought to myself, "Here's where this batting bird gets caught flat-footed."

Old Jess's phenom kinder hunched his shoulders and swung that bat like a flash of soft-soaped lightning. Crack! The ball traveled like a white streak out across-country and it took two fielders to get it back to the diamond from the point where it finally stopped. It would have been a home run in the Yankee center field.

"An accident," I opines to Jess. The thing couldn't have been anything else.

"He pulls them kind of accidents nearly ever' time he comes up," replies Jess, grinning wide and happy.

I waited until it came his turn again and he slammed one down the third base line so hot the fielder started to put out his bare hand for the stop but evidently thought better of it and let it go. And I didn't blame him. Then the game started and, as far as I and the rest of the crowd were concerned, it was a private exhibition by Vernoy Stubbs. Against the roundhouse curves which the twirler always telegraphed he was a batterin' fool. A homer, two triples, a single, a walk, and a skyscraper which a fielder wandered under and caught, was his record. And the gardeners were playing back clean outside the lot for him each time he came up.

Jess pounded me on the back until I was sore as three pups with one bone between them, but I couldn't get excited. I had a pretty strong hunch that Vernoy Stubbs would be left at the church door when he got up against real pitching. However, I had to admit that he could field a lot better

than Grimes, and also I knew that I could teach him something about hitting, once I got him on the lot at home.

That evening after the game Jess and I drifted around to that boarding-house and found young Stubbs eating supper. We sat in and, afterward while waiting for the train, had a talk with him. That is, we did the talking with him coming in with the nods and uh-huh's. I offered him expenses until he had tried out, and, if he made good, a salary of two hundred a month. He jumped at it like a hungry trout and a half-hour later we were on our way. Vernoy's smile had expanded some, and his whole face was lit up like a kid with his first rifle. He was tickled silly all right, but he kept quiet and stayed in the background.

Jess took him in tow when we got home and brought him around for the morning practice at ten o'clock the next day. The boys had fitted him up with a uniform and he was out chasing flies when I arrived. I let him do as he pleased for half an hour while I batted out a few to the infield; and then I called him over on third where I shot some easy bounders down to him. He gobbled them up like he was starved for them; and then I opened up with a few over the bag and mixed them with others down closer to short. He went after them all spraddled out and awkward, but he got them. Those long arms of his could reach where the other man couldn't and he pulled down liners and scooped up sizzlers on the grass in a manner that brought comments from the other boys. He let some go between his legs and fumbled others that he should have had easy, but I knew that with a little hard practice daily he'd be a big improvement over Grimes on the hot corner.

I sent Commy Lovett out to the mound to toss 'em over for the batting practice, telling him to lob 'em up to young Stubbs for a while and then turn loose his best shoots when I gave him the signal. The first two or three times up Stubbs drove the ball to all corners of the lot. He wasn't a groove hitter; he scattered 'em over the place most anywhere there didn't happen to be a fielder. Old Jess was sitting on the bench watching the proceedings with a look like a cat after eating the canary. I didn't want to show Stubbs up particularly, in fact, I kinder wanted to nurse him along slow and easy, but I couldn't resist the temptation to rub off that smirk from Old Jess's face. I signaled Lovett to shoot over a couple of wide fast

ones and then follow with some quick hoppers over the plate.

The "Phenom" stood still and watched the two wide ones pass, and then Lovett turned loose one of his special inshoots over the inside of the pan. Stubbs swung unbelievably quick and drove the ball against the right field wall line not ten feet over the heads of the infield. Lovett looked surprised and I know I did. A single delighted, "Yah!" came from Old Jess on the bench.

I kept Stubbs in the box for ten minutes and Lovett gave him everything he had. Still that loose-jointed mistake stepped into 'em regularly. I began to see another big star, a hundred thousand dollar trade with the big leagues, and, with the proceeds, a real championship team made of the Tars.

Naturally I went easy with my find, figgering on teaching him the fine points of the game and making a real star out of him. And right there is where I made one of the biggest mistakes in my promising managerial career.

That bird could field and hit, but that let him out. His brains might as well have been an Edam cheese for all the good they did him. Thinking was out of his line. He'd do whatever I told him to do, but I couldn't follow him all around the bases and keep him posted. I tried to teach him this "strategy," but, unless everything happened just like you told him, he was left stranded way up in the air with no idea of what was going on. In the practice games the boys could pick him off the base with any sort of an old trick and he never could understand how it happened. The only time he knew exactly what to do was when he slammed the ball clean out of the lot.

First I tried to teach him how to stand at the plate. But the trouble was he couldn't carry two ideas in his head at once. If he centered on his stand, he couldn't see the ball. Finally I had to give it up and let him hit like he always had, which was good enough for me to give him a chance on third and pray to the god of luck every time men got on the bases.

His gangly, six-foot, appearance gained for him a lot of publicity before he got a try-out on the team. Although our practice sessions were never attended by the sports writers it leaked out that we had a fence buster ready for the next invasion of the Lions and the report brought out a whale of a crowd.

On Stubbs's first appearance at the plate he caught one of Hill's fast ones and lifted

it into the creek over the left field wall. The fans took him to their bosoms, dubbed him "Buster" and thereafter, when he



came to the plate, greeted him loud and long. He responded nobly with a couple of two-baggers and two or three bits of spectacular fielding. And the next morning he was the city's leading citizen. His picture was in both papers, mine alongside, for I came in for my share of the laurels for discovering the "greatest ball player that ever graced the Tar uniform."

The strangest thing about it was that this fulsome praise didn't have any effect at all on Buster Stubbs. Sometimes I doubt whether he knew what it was all about. Anyway, he docilely took every bit of advice I gave him and tried his darndest to do it, but he always forgot it when an emergency came up. I don't know, whether there is any scientific truth back of my belief or not, but it looked to me like his nerves were paralyzed for an instant when he switched from one track to another. If he was thinking about one thing he couldn't get that off his mind until it was too late to do anything else. I usually signaled him what to do and let him go on and finish it that way no matter what happened. For that reason, during the next few weeks, I got the blame for many a boner which I didn't deserve. And Buster continued to be the chief worship of the population.

Kavanaugh got back on second and I had as fast an infield as I could want, all except when there were men on bases, and then my heart was in my boots. If Buster got it into his head to throw to second, to Kavanaugh it went no matter if the runner had already pilfered the bag. But as usual I got the blame for most of it, although some of the sports writers razed Stubbs a few times in a half-hearted manner. However, I could stand a lot of their howls because my team was winning ball and once more we were crowding on the heels of the Lions.

We met the Governors for a three game series and mopped up while the Lions hit a slump and tobogganed until only a few points separated us. I began to dream of that contract and extra two grand and I was pushing the boys to the limit. After another week of see-sawing, Buster broke

loose on a rampage and won three games in a row with his fence-busting. That boy was leading the league with the stick with an average well above .400 and was getting better every day as he kinder got used to the boys' pitching. When we got back from a heart-breaking trip on which most of our games went into extra innings, wearing my moundsmen to a frazzle, we were in second place by a safe margin, with the Lions still slumping. Five full games ahead of us were the Governors and they were going strong. Jackson, their star twirler, had the season's record of victories and the entire organization was going great guns.

Still playing with everything we had, the Tars held their own during the next two weeks and even gained a notch or two on the Governors. With the close of the season only two weeks away, we were three games behind the Governors and we had a series of three games with them on the last three days. The stage was all set for Buster to go down in history as an all-wool hero.

I took Buster under my wing and for the next seven days I kept him on the lot from eight in the morning until noon trying to drill some of the "strategy" of the game into his head. If it had been anyone else I would have worn them down until they would have been hospital meat, but that boy was tireless. He never got enough baseball and he was willing to stay on the lot all day if I thought it necessary, but his head was stuffed with the same material they put in baseball bats. For a month the opposing slabmen had been playing him, feeding him wide ones and making him reach after them or else walk him. Once they got him on the bases they picked him off with such frequency that it worried the life out of him.

We landed on the Grays for a series of three games while the Governors were dropping one out of three to the Maples who were close down to the bottom, and we went into the last week still two games behind the Governors. The Maples were on hand for the first three days and the Tars were out for blood. I had been talking to them every morning and I had them fighting mad. Buster led the slaughter and drove every pitcher they had to the showers, making enough tallies in those three days to run the score keepers dizzy. If they kept up that pace I knew they'd make the Governors look like a pair of pink socks at a funeral, kinder out of place. Meanwhile the Lions had gone on a bat-

ting spree and had taken two out of three from the Governors which put us on even terms with the latter for the pennant and my extra two grand.

Thursday morning the Governors landed in town with a couple of train loads of the faithful and a brass band. They marched out to the park that afternoon and lined up back of their dugout. It looked like the whole city was milling around the gates trying to get in when I got there about one o'clock. That was the first time that burg had been waked up since the main grocery store got on fire before prohibition.

I lined the boys up in the clubhouse and gave them a little talk. They were geared on high and impatient to get at it.

"Boys," I says, "we're going to play straight baseball today without any of the frills. They're warming up Kopnak and you know what he's got. You've got to him before and you can do it again. Tomorrow they'll use Jackson and then we're going to be up against something else, but we'll not cross any bridges before we get to 'em. Today you've got to go out there and hit 'em hard and often. Can you do it?"

A chorus of yells greeted my speech and I knew that game was all over but the shouting.

Kopnak was stingy with his hits and we didn't get a man on until the fifth, when Hart slipped one down the line between first and second for a clean single. Dufus laid down a bunt on the third base line and Hart was on second. It was all set for Buster and he obliged by lifting one into the crowds in left field good for three bases under the ground rules. I stopped him on third base by main strength and he scored a minute later on an infield out. In the eighth Buster cracked one over the fence for the circuit and the crowd went delirious. My second best pitcher, Small, held the Governors safely throughout the game. They collected nine hits, but he kept them scattered and tightened in pinches when a bingle meant a score.

Buster had a monopoly on the front page of the newspapers, and some of the boys read it all over to him in the clubhouse the next morning while we were getting the kinks out and holding a skull session. He was gravely interested in it all, but he



didn't offer any comment. Any other man on the team would have puffed up like a barrel of dried apples in the rain, but, I'll have to hand it to Bus, it didn't cause him to turn a hair.

Shoestring McMahon walked in and the boys crowded around him. For a minute my heart stood still. If that boy was able to pitch! I hadn't been around to the hospital for several weeks, being so busy chasing that pennant, and I didn't know how fast the boy was coming through. But one look at him pancaked my hopes. He was so thin he could have drunk one of Gus's pink lemonades and made a thermometer out of himself. He shook hands with me and I asks him to make a speech.

"Boys," he starts out, and there is a choke in his voice, "I'd give all I ever expect to have to be out there today and help you win that old flag we've been chasing so long. I couldn't stay in the hospital with this goin' on. If you win today—but there ain't no ifs. You'll do it and, boys, I'll be ready next year to help hold it."

The gang yelled a help and milled around. Then I took the stump.

"There won't be no game tomorrow," I says. "When we win today, that ends it. But we've got to be on our toes. Jackson is pitching today and you know what that means. He's the slickest bird in the league and if we outguess him, we can be plumb proud of ourselves. You fellows have got to keep your eye on me. Watch me for every play. It's strategy that wins when you go up against the Governors, with Jackson up. Lovett's pitching for us today. He'll put 'em where he wants 'em to go. All you've got to do is to play as I tell you. Let's go!"

The crowd was bigger than it had been on the previous day. There were some wheelchairs in the overflow in right—even the crippled were out in force. Old Man Gries was bouncing around like a new rubber ball. He shook hands with me four times that I remember of. When Buster came on the field the roar that went up must have been heard in the next county, but he was so busy trying to remember all the things I had been telling him that he didn't have time to pay any attention.

Then the game started. From the first it was a pitcher's battle with both Jackson and Lovett in perfect form and control. Hits were as scarce as pet skunks at a fashion show, and those two rows of goose-eggs on the scoreboard kept lengthening out almost all the way across. Twice the hostile team got men on bases, once as far

as second, but Lovett knew the next batter's weaknesses and fed 'em up to him so that he'd hit 'em where they could be picked up by the infield or captured in the outfield. With Gallagher and a man on first and second in the sixth inning I signaled Lovett to let him have a low curve on the outside of the plate and at the same time I motioned Kavannaugh to come over toward first. Gallagher, their most dangerous hitter, slammed a wicked one right into Kavannaugh's hands for a double play.

Buster should have had a couple of doubles on long, low liners far into the gardens, but each time the fielders were playing back in the edge of the crowd and had plenty of time to camp under them. In the sixth he poked a single over short and then when I signaled a hit and run on the second pitched ball, he tore loose on the first one and was caught standing up at second. The crowd bood him for the first time since he came to the Tars and he came in with a surprised look on his phiz. It wouldn't do any good to bawl him out so I said nothing.

In the eighth it began to look like the Governors'd score, but with one down Buster grabbed a liner about five feet over his head and whipped it to second in time to cut off the runner who had started at the crack of the bat. We didn't get anywhere in our half, and Lovett cut them down three in a row in the first of the ninth.

CAME the last half with Bus up, with everything primed for him to set off the match to the fireworks. And permit me sonorously to state he did that little thing.

The outfielders drifted back to the edge of the crowds again and were waiting for him when he stepped to the plate. The infield got clean back on the grass leaving the diamond lonely as a graveyard. Right there was where I got my idea for the big strategy which was going to win the pennant. It was simple and, with a little luck, would have made me mayor of the burg. But I had forgotten that I was working that strategy with Buster Stubbs at the bat. *With the whole team playing away out I called on him to lay down a bunt.*

The first ball was wide and the second Bus laid down as neatly as Eddie Collins could have placed it, and was off in a long lope for first. Jackson dived for it, scooped it up and threw all in the same movement, but in his hurry he overthrew

first. The coach sent Buster on down to second while the crowd yelled its head off. The ball hit somebody's wadded-up sweater about twenty feet behind first and stopped dead. The right fielder, who was backing up the throw, grabbed it and shot it to second. Bus, glancing over his shoulder, saw the play and immediately forgot all I had taught him about the hook slide. He went in on his head all doubled up and I don't see yet how he kept from breaking his neck.

The throw was low and arrived about the same time Bus did. In the cloud of dust I couldn't see exactly what happened except that the umps waved Bus safe and I danced a jig around third for a minute. Kavanaugh was up and I had a hunch he would come through with a single. He had a habit of doing that thing right when it was necessary.

But something was wrong down at second. I saw Buster get up and look around on the ground at his feet. The baseman was doing the same thing as was the umpire. At first I thought it was the lost ball trick to tag Bus. I yelled at him to sit down on the bag and he started to obey, but suddenly he grew rigid and his jaw dropped. I wondered if he had a stroke or something and was getting ready to call time and see what was the matter. The



baseman and the umpire were still searching for the ball.

Suddenly Bus ducked at a dead run for

third and I tried to stop him, but he grinned and hoofed it home as fast as he could make it. The crowd was in hysterics, and the umpires were staring at Buster as if he had gone out of his mind. I hurried along and caught up with him as he dropped into the dugout. The crowd was swarming on the field, but the ushers and a couple of cops drove them back. When I saw the field was cleared I rushed up to Bus.

"What the——?"

He grinned. "I get what you meant by that word 'strategy,'" he said. "It worked." *He slipped his hand down inside his shirt, pulled the ball out and handed it to me.* The umpire was standing there looking at us.

"Where'd you get it? Did you steal it?" I wanted to know.

"No. It got inside my shirt when I slid. I felt it wiggle."

"Yer out!" yells the umps at Bus.

Of course I raised a kick which brought on a conference between the two umps and I'm nineteen separate and distinct kinds of a liar if they didn't forfeit that game to the Governors—called it a "deliberate attempt to steal the pennant and a dangerous reflection on the cleanliness of the sport in the league." That decision stood although I appealed to every known power under the sun. Buster Stubbs couldn't stand the gaff and that night he disappeared. To this day I haven't seen hide nor hair of him. Now I ask you, what chance had I to prove it was an accident when the man who pulled it had vanished into the tall and uncut?

Oh, yes, we lost the next game, eight to nothing. The boys somehow couldn't raise any pep after that great strategic play. I quit cold, beat old Gries to it and resigned. Strategy! Huh! Bull luck, that's what I call it.

BUFFALO PATHS

RANGING in size from a foot-and-a-half wide and a few inches deep, up to wide and hard-packed roads, the buffalo paths crossed and criss-crossed the prairies, foothills, and mountains and usually led the traveler to water; but at times they led him to dried ponds and he had his labor for nothing. The narrower paths were so sharply cut as to suggest the use of tools. In some places they were so numerous and intermingled as to puzzle and confuse even the best plainsman; in others they stretched away with a directness which would have been creditable to an engineer. The paths converging from a dry plain to the ford of a river were so worn and so deep and wide that the rain-water, rushing along them, cut through the hard-packed surface and turned them into deep gullies, ravines, and even stream beds, ever growing deeper; in some localities this started erosions of banks and bluffs which eventually carried them away and left mires in their stead. Often the larger paths could be told from man-made roads only by the tracks showing on them; and early travelers often exclaimed at the excellent selection, directness and quality of these paths, and from them attributed to their makers a sagacity far beyond their mental equipment and powers.—C. E. M.

DISAPPEARING DALRYMPLE

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

Author of "An Eye for an Eye," "Peace River Pendleton," etc.

DETECTIVES OF BIG CITIES, INCLUDING NEW YORK, FOUND DAPPER DAN MUCH LIKE AN EEL. IT NEVER OCCURRED TO THEM TO TRY ASHES FOR SLIPPERINESS

DAPPER DAN DALRYMPLE had been a thorn in the side of the Department so long now that he had become a sort of institution. So much so in fact that, finally hounded from pillar to post, he had between two suns transferred his activities, and these were many and varied, from Philadelphia, which had been his stamping ground for ten zestful, highly-colored years, to New York, and the wider field of activity which the metropolis afforded.

The police of the City of Brotherly Love were not exactly in love with Dapper Dan; they hated him as the devil is said to hate holy water; and, in passing, it may be said that between the chiefs of detectives of the two cities, following a certain sarcastic reference on the part of Gunson of the New York Bureau, there had not existed for some time now anything approaching an *entente cordiale*.

For Dapper Dan was elusive; he was here today and gone tomorrow; he had a faculty for disappearing, almost under the noses of the laboring sleuths who, in Philadelphia at any rate, had had trouble enough in keeping up with his rapid fire operations, without attending to the little matter of his apprehension and incarceration behind bars.

A con man who was so smooth that, in the parlance of certain newspaper reporters, he would have needed skid-chains to keep his feet down long enough to stay in one place a split second by the watch, Dapper Dan on a dozen different occasions in the past had been under lock and key—almost but not quite. At the last moment,

with the grim hand of the law upon his shoulder, he had always, somehow, squirmed free, to reappear abruptly with a lightning quick "touch" where he was least expected. With Dapper Dan the faculty had amounted almost to genius; and so far he had yet to languish behind bars.



Detective Gunson, of the New York Bu-

reau, had heard of Dapper Dan, as was but natural. In fact, he had seen him, at one time or another, in the line-up at headquarters. Now, on a warm afternoon of early spring, patrolling his beat along Fifth Avenue, he had seen or thought that he had seen, for a split second, a figure that had seemed vaguely familiar.

A man in a light tan overcoat, walking with a peculiar, lifting swagger, had passed abruptly from the Avenue into and through the throng of shoppers into the world-famous jewelry house of Gutelius; the plainclothesman, out of the tail of his eye, had seen him just long enough to bring from his lips the two explosive, significant words of, "Dapper Dan!"

But the throng was dense; the detective, by the time he had elbowed his way inside, had lost the man in the light tan overcoat and soft, shapeless hat. But he was certain that it had been Dapper Dan.

And then, far down an aisle there rose, all at once, a murmur growing to a mutter, and a quick, frenzied shout of:

"Stop thief!"

The detective, catapulting inward like a football player going through a broken field, had, for a moment, a glimpse of a light tan overcoat—it had whisked round the aisle corner even as he looked. Ahead of him now, in the swirl and eddy of the milling crowd, he heard that cry, repeated from the long counter just across with a stream of protesting French or German, he could not tell which.

Stranding not upon the order of his going, Gunson, by main strength, had reached the door, to see, once again, as he rushed through the doorway, that light tan overcoat. For a split second, beneath the soft, shapeless hat he had a glimpse of a dark, mocking face; then, even as he sprang forward, it was gone.

The plainclothesman, however, in his rush, had reached the street corner. From there, following a moment's brusque converse with the policeman on the beat, he turned backward, leaden-footed, slow.

An inquiry within the shop elicited the information that it had been indeed Dapper Dan. And this time his getaway had

taken with it the trifling matter of a necklace worth fifty thousand as it stood.

There were no two ways about it; Dapper Dan, on his first day in the metropolis, had scored! Gunson, remembering that brief, ironic message to the Philadelphia police, squirmed mentally while, once more upon the sidewalk, he went northward upon the way leading to the station-house, ready with his report.

It would be a report that he would take no pleasure in making; that much was certain. And then abruptly he halted, breath indrawn sharply through set teeth.

There, not ten paces in advance, moving, carefree and at ease, with his swift, silent jungle step, was the man in the light tan overcoat!

Gunson made one single, lurching stride; then his hand flashed out in a lightning stab for the other's shoulder.

"Well, well, if it ain't Dapper Dan!" he was beginning. "Now, we'll take a little walk——"

There came a sudden wrench, a twist, and the man in the light overcoat had turned upon him with blazing eyes. The detective's face purpled, he stuttered, choked, falling backward a pace, his jaw slack, mouth open in an abrupt wonder and disgust.

For the man's face, as it had come level with his own, was a face that he had never seen!

II

IT WAS not possible for Gunson to have been mistaken. He knew Dapper Dan well and unfavorably, to cite the ancient adage with a reverse twist; face to face, he could not have been wrong.

Having reported to his chief, he made his way out to the street, and went onward, to walk head down forward along the quiet street. His mood was the reverse of pleasant.

It was a quiet residential neighborhood in the West Seventies, and he had ample opportunity for reflection — had food for thought, at any rate, for it was past his luncheon hour and he had forgotten all about it!

Dapper Dan, on his first day in the metropolis, had

struck twelve in broad daylight and on the Avenue, and—where was Dapper Dan?

Somewhere secure, doubtless, laughing in his sleeve at the boasted efficiency of the metropolitan police. For in the terse language of Gunson's superior Dalrymple had "made suckers of the whole kit-and-caboodle"; he had made them look like dummies, the first crack out of the box.

Well, it was a pretty kettle of fish, and no mistake! Gunson, chin sunk on his chest, in his mind's eye could see the headlines as they would appear in a little while in the early editions:

DISAPPEARING DALRYMPLE PUTS IT OVER NABS NECKLACE UNDER NOSES OF COPS
POLICE ARE POWERLESS

That would make sweet reading for the Philadelphia police, it would for a fact! Gunson, chewing the cud of his chagrin, glanced down the street, then up, and upon the instant stiffened abruptly like a pointer at gaze.

Ahead of him, distant scarcely half a block, there had appeared all at once a man walking, lightfoot on the balls of his feet—a man in a light tan overcoat and soft, shapeless hat!

The detective swore softly under his breath, quickening his pace as, from the corner of the street beyond there showed the looming figure of the policeman on the beat, the sun winking on the brass buttons. But he was going in the same direction; his broad back vanished round the corner even as Gunson looked.

But this time there could be no mistake. For a brief instant, etched against the sunlight, the detective had seen the man's face, hawklike, with lowered lids. It was Disappearing Dalrymple, and he was but a scant half-block away.

His gait now a quick, pounding run, the detective drew nearer, by feet, by yards, and still that tall figure in the light overcoat held onward at a rapid walk. Just ahead, and perhaps ten paces beyond pursuer and pursued, there was a huge, square-sided motor truck; blocking the sidewalk, it loomed in Dalrymple's path as, turning his head, he saw the detective coming up.

Almost at that distance Gunson fancied that he could see the sneering grin, the brief flicker of the fingers in an ironic farewell; then Dalrymple had vanished behind that truck just as there came a sudden thunder in the narrow way. The detective, quickening his pace, rounded the corner of the truck in high. His jaw slack,



he stopped dead, staring pop-eyed at the long, deserted street, empty of all life under the declining sun.

Disappearing Dalrymple had—disappeared!

III

FLUSH with the street here there was an ash-hoist. Gunson, glancing upward at the building just across, gave a dry grimace of disgust and of realization—and of something else. So near and yet so far! And in plain sight of—well, Dalrymple *must* be a wizard, and no mistake! He turned now to the man, stolid, foreign, eyes lack lustre under sleepy brows, who, atop the ash wagon, stared down at him, face gray with dust and sweat.

For a moment, even as he harbored the thought, the detective dismissed it as absurd: the ash man certainly could not be Dalrymple. Even the Disappearing One could not have rounded the corner of that truck, disguising himself with soot and grime which was plainly the result of many months, in the brief interval in which he had been invisible to the pursuer at his back. But where *had* he gone?

"Seen anything of a man in a light overcoat and soft hat?" asked Gunson, peering upward at the ashman on the truck. And the answer, when it came, removed all doubt.

"No, mister, ay bane see nobuddy. Wat you tank?"

For a split second the detective had thought to see in the sleepy-lidded eyes a faint flicker, like the sun on water. But no, the fellow was plainly a stupid one. Busy with his ashes, he would not have noticed had there been an earthquake in the quiet street.

Gunson turned, snarling under his breath a bitter, brooding malediction; then, at a slow, dragging walk, he was away. Meanwhile—

IV

EVENING had come, and the street lamps glimmered in the quiet street when, below the level of the walk, out of that asphalt below the level of the street, there came all at once a fumbling rustle, a mutter, a murmur, then a thick, turgid oath.

A light danced, glimmering on floor and wall, as, in the reflection of its glow a figure, ash gray from head to foot, emerged, crawling upon hands and knees,

outward to the cellar and the comparative cleanness of the asphalt floor.

A prodigious sneeze, stifled at birth, proclaimed that it was indeed a man, but a man whose own mother would not have known, even in the light of day.

A moment Disappearing Dalrymple stood, grinning, in spite of his discomfort. Once again he had won clear. For, to gain egress from that house would be an easy matter. In the tenth of a second that he had rounded that truck he had seen in one flashing glance that the ashman, his back turned, had been oblivious; and in that brief moment his decision had been taken.

The hoist had been going down; even as he sprang, hidden from Gunson's view by the great truck, the hoist cover had grazed his head by the proverbial eyelash; then, downward into the cellar he had gone while, above him, Gunson, raging, had turned sullenly away.

In the moment that the detective, rounding the truck, had come upon the scene, the ash hoist had been closed. The truck, sidewise to the street, had hidden the whole occurrence. And there had been something else: in the moment that Dapper Dan had literally taken the plunge, his hand, reaching, had opened the wagon-slide—the chute. That had been the reason of the roar that the detective had heard—the noise of the ashes pouring downward out of that truck to pile in a small mountain upon that ash hoist lid! It was inconceivable that beneath that dust gray heap there could be a man.

The driver, with an imagination at the zero point, had looked, startled; then with an oath had checked that downpour. But the thing was done.

And now, walking forward softly on the balls of his feet, Dapper Dan—a Dapper Dan now only in name, indeed—waited a moment, listening, holding his breath. He had composed himself to wait there in the darkness until the chance that he might be discovered would be reduced to a minimum. And glancing at the radium dial of his watch he saw that it was late.

There was a spiral, iron stairway just across from him; he went up it now, pocketing his flash, feeling ahead of him for the handle of a door which presently, turning it without sound, he opened, inch by careful inch.

He found himself in thick darkness, a



darkness that was musty, like a vault. Feeling before him with his finger tips, he was aware that he was in a closet, or rather a small room, through the door of which he could hear merely the ticking of a clock.

Applying his eye to the keyhole, he could see nothing; plainly the room beyond was in darkness, too; after a moment, turning the doorknob with careful fingers, he felt rather than saw that he was in a wide, high ceilinged chamber empty, as he was certain; there was no one there. But he must be careful. Possibly the household was not yet asleep for the night; it would not do to blunder.

And then a thin smile edged his lips, a smile of calculation, of elation, and of a sudden, swift, tigerish resolve. He was here, inside the house. Presumably it was the house of a substantial citizen. There would be pickings here, for him who could take them; and that would be duck soup for Dapper Dan.

Making the circle of the room, his hand in the darkness suddenly touched a something cold and hard—a glass door, swinging open, which bespoke a cabinet of some sort. Then, his swift, exploring fingers outspread before him, he froze abruptly, rigid, where he stood.

Guns!

That was what he had touched there in the darkness. Guns, a regular arsenal of them! He had stumbled upon the gun-room of a sportsman. And that meant, in this neighborhood and street, the establishment of a millionaire, at the very least.

By now he had gotten some of the ashes from his face; fastidious, as always, he thought ruefully of his new, exquisitely tailored morning suit, the very latest wrinkle, indeed, since by now it was all wrinkles, ingrained with ash.

But he would make somebody pay for that.

Going forward carefully, with the stealth and caution of an Indian, he had made the circuit of the room, halting at last at a doorway that opened under his hand, admitting him to a smaller room in which, as he could feel, there were a desk and chairs.

Now, for the first time, he produced his pocket flash, to find that he was in a sort of office, as he could see, furnished with a Spartan simplicity—for a millionaire.

But millionaires, many of them, were like that; and this man, a sportsman, would scarcely furnish an office with sybaritic

ease. But the desk was heavy, substantial; his feet sank in the thick pile of a rug that was Daghestan, at the very least.

And it was then that, snapping on the wall switch, he recoiled; his hand went out and again black darkness enveloped him with the dousing of the light.

For beyond that office he had heard, on a sudden, the murmur of voices, muffled, as through many thicknesses of walls.

V

CROUCHING there in the thick darkness, he could hear those voices coming nearer. A late party, possibly. And could they have seen the light shining through that door?

Dapper Dan, resisting an impulse to return backward the way which he had come, of a sudden thought better of it as, close at hand, he heard the voices, high-pitched now, and the quick *pad-pad* of running feet.

His hand, reaching behind him for the door by which he had made entry, turned the knob, exerted a quick, silent pressure. But the door was fast. He was locked in.

Fool that he had been not to have made certain of that spring lock! But now it was too late.

Lip lifting from his white, even teeth, as a trapped animal grins at the hunters, his hand, in a quick stab for his automatic, came away as the outer door burst open with a slattering crash. He was conscious of a sudden blaze of light, faces, dim figures crowding close, with, of a sudden, a great voice roaring in the narrow room.

"Dapper Dan! Welcome to our city!

Well, what do you know about that!"

As in a mist he saw the face of Gunson, behind it others; their laughter echoed in a roaring chorus as, like a lance of light, the realization of the truth came to him at the sight of



Gunson and the rest.

Mouth open, he slumped backward against the wall.

He was in the police-station! By night perhaps the green lights might have warned, but in the bright sunlight, and at the quick urge of his desperate need, he had not known.

Disappearing Dalrymple had broken *into* jail!



GRIST

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "A Wireless for the Fangless One," "The Captain of the Quiberon," etc.

THE MILLS OF THE GODS SET UP IN THE NORTHERN FASTNESSES GRIND OUT PERIL AND LOYALTY; FEAR AND COURAGE—AND THE TESTS THAT ARE TO TRY THE SOULS OF THOSE WHOSE DESTINY CALLS THEM TO THE LAND OF FROST AND GOLD

I

HE THREW back his head and howled eerily. His muzzle lifted to the stars and the most mournful sound known to man poured from his throat and was echoed and reechoed by the hooded cedars and the rocks about him. He could not have told you why he howled. Dogs are not prone to introspection. But he knew that his master, who should be in the cabin yonder, would never come out again. He knew that the dying wisps of smoke from the chimney would never billow out in thick gray clouds again. And he knew that the other man—who had come out so hastily and gone swinging down the river trail—would never, never return.

Cheechako was chained. It had originally been a mark of disgrace, an unbearable humiliation to a malamute pup, but he did not mind it any longer. His master had made sleeping quarters for him that were vastly warmer than a snow-bed even in the coldest weather, and Cheechako wholeheartedly approved. He was comfortable, he was fed, and Carson released him now and then to stretch his legs and swore at him affectionately from time to time, and no reasonable dog will demand any more. Or so Cheechako viewed it, anyhow.

But now his muzzle tilted up. His eyes half-closed, and from his throat those desolate and despairing howls poured forth. *A-a-o-oooo-e-e! A-a-o-oooo-e-e!* They were a dirge and a lament. They were sounds of grief and they were noises of despair. Cheechako could not explain their meaning at all, but when a man dies they spring full-bodied from that man's dog's throat.

The hooded cedars watched, and echoed back the sound. The rocks about him watched, and gave tongue stilly in a faint reflection of his sorrow. The river listened, and babbled absently of sympathy and rippled on. The river has seen too many men die to be disturbed. The wilds listened. For many miles around the despairing, grief-stricken howling reached. To tree and forest, and hill and valley, the thin and muted wailing bore its message. Only the cabin seemed indifferent, though the tragedy was within it. Somewhere within the four log walls Carson lay sprawled out. Cheechako knew that he was dead without knowing how he knew. There had been a shot. Later, the other man had come out hastily with a pack on his back. He had taken the river trail and disappeared.

And long into the night, until the pale moonlight faded and died, Cheechako

howled his sorrow for a thing he did not understand. Of his own predicament, the dog had yet no knowledge. It was natural to be chained. Food was brought when one was chained. That there was now no one to bring him food, that no one was



likely to come, and that the most pertinacious of puppy teeth could not work through the chain that bound him; these things did not disturb him. His head thrown back, his eyes half-closed, he howled in an ecstasy of grief.

And while he gave vent to his sorrow in the immemorable tradition of his race, a faint rumbling set up afar off in the wilds. It was hardly more than a murmur, and maybe it was the wind among the trees. Maybe it was a minor landslide in the hills not so many miles away—a few hundred tons of earth and stone that plunged downward when the thaw of spring released its keystone. Maybe it was any one of any number of things, even a giant spruce tree crashing thunderously to the ground. But it lasted a little too long for any such simple explanation. If one were inclined to be fanciful, one would say it was the mill of one of the forest gods, grinding the grist of men's destinies, and set going now by the murder of which Cheechako howled.

Certainly many unrelated things began to happen which bore obscurely upon that killing. The man who had fled down-river reflected on his cleverness and grinned to himself. He opened thick sausage-like bags and ran his fingers through shining yellow dust. Remembering his security against detection or punishment, he laughed cacklingly.

And very far away—away down in Seattle—Bob Holliday found courage to ask a girl to marry him, and promised to go back to Alaska only long enough to gather together what capital he had accumulated, when they would be married. Most of what he owned, he told her, was in a placer claim that he and Sam Carson worked together. He would sell out to Sam and return. But he would not take her back to the hardships he had endured. He was filled with a fierce desire to shield and protect her. That meant money, Outside, of course. And he started north eagerly for the results of many years' suffering and

work, which Sam Carson was guarding for him.

And again, in a dingy small building a sleepy mail clerk discovered a letter that had slipped behind account-books and been hidden for months on end. He canceled its stamp and dropped it into a mail bag to go to its proper destination.

Then, the rumbling murmur which might have been the mill of a forest god off in the wilds stopped abruptly. The grist had had its first grinding.

But the mill was not put away. Oh, no. Cheechako howled on until the moonlight paled and day came again. And the letter that had lain so long was dropped into a canoe and floated down to the coast in charge of a half-breed paddleman. And Bob Holliday sped north for Alaska and his partner, Sam Carson, who guarded a small fortune that Holliday had earned in sweat and agony and fierce battle with the wilds and winter snows. Holliday was very happy. The money his partner held for him would mean comforts and even luxuries for the girl he loved.

The mill of the forest god was simply laid aside for a little while. They grind, not slowly—these mills of the gods—but very swiftly, more swiftly than the grist can come to their grinding stones. Now and then they are forced to wait for more. But everything upon the earth comes to them some time. High ambitions and most base desires, and women's laughter and red blood gushing, and all hopes and fears and lusts and terrors together disappear between the millstones and come out transformed into the product that the gods desire.

The mill was merely waiting.

II

THE place had that indefinable air of desertion that comes upon a wilderness cabin in such an amazingly short time. The wood pile, huge, yet clearly but the remnant of a winter's supply, had not yet sprouted any of the mosses and lichens that multiply on dead wood in the short Alaskan summer. The axe, even, was leaned against the door. Chips still rested on blades of the quickly-growing grass that comes before the snow has vanished. A pipe rested on a bench before the house. But the place was deserted. The feel of emptiness was in the air.

Holliday had drawn in his breath for a shout to announce his coming when the curious desolation all about struck home.

It was almost like a blow. Every sign and symbol of occupancy. Every possible indication that the place was what it seemed to be—the winter quarters of an



old-timer thriftily remaining near his claim. And then, suddenly, the feeling of emptiness that was like death.

He disembarked in silence, his forehead creased in a quick and puzzled frown. He was walking swiftly when he climbed the bluff, glancing sharply here and there. A sudden cold apprehension made him hesitate. Then he shook himself impatiently and moved more quickly still.

Within ten yards of the door he stopped stock-still. And then he fairly rushed for the cabin and plunged within.

It was a long time later that he came out. He was very pale, and looked like a man who has been shaken to the core. He was swearing brokenly. Then he made himself stop and sit down. With shaking fingers he filled his pipe and lighted it.

"In his bunk," he said evenly to the universe. "A bullet through his head. No sign of a fight. It isn't credible—but there isn't a sign of any dust or any supplies, and somebody else had been bunking in there with him. Murder, of course."

He smoked. Presently he got up and found a path which he followed. At its end he saw what he was looking for. He poked about the cradle there, and expertly fingered the heap of gravel that had been thawed and dug out to be washed when summer came again.

"He'd cleaned up," he said evenly. "He must have had a lot of dust, and the man with him knew it. I've got to find that man."

His hands clenched and unclenched as he went back toward the cabin. Then he calmed himself again. His eyes searched for a suitable spot for the thing he had to do.

And then, quite suddenly, "My God!" said Holliday.

It was Cheechako, who had dragged

himself to the limit of his chain and with his last atom of strength managed to whimper faintly. Cheechako was not pretty to look at. It had been a very long time since the night that he howled to the stars of his grief for the man who was dead. And he had been chained fast. Cheechako was alive, and that was all.

He lay on the ground, looking up with agonized, pitiful eyes. Holliday stared down at him and reached for his gun in sheer mercy. Then his eyes hardened.

"No-o-o. I guess not. You'll be Sam's dog. You'll have to stay alive a while yet. Maybe you can pick out his murderer for me."

He unbuckled the collar that Cheechako's most frenzied efforts had not enabled him to reach, and took the mass of skin and boniness beneath down toward his canoe. With a face like stone he tended Cheechako with infinite gentleness.

And that night he left Cheechako wrapped up in his own blankets while he carved deeply upon a crudely fashioned wooden cross. His expression frightened Cheechako a little, but the dog lay huddled in the blankets and gazed at him hungrily. Cheechako hoped desperately that this man would be his master hereafter. Only, he also hoped desperately that he would never, never use a chain.

III

CHEECHAKO learned much and forgot a little in the weeks that followed. When he could stand on his wabbling paws, Holliday took him off invalid's diet and fed him more naturally canine dishes—the perpetual dried or frozen fish of the dog-teams, for instance. Cheechako wolfed it as he wolfed everything else, and in that connection learned a lesson. Once in his eagerness he leaped up to snatch it from Holliday's hand. His snapping teeth closed on empty air, and he was soundly thrashed for the effort. Later, he learned not to snarl or snap if his food was taken squarely from between his teeth. When he had mastered that, he was tamed. He understood that he was not to try to bite Holliday under any circumstances whatever. And when he had mastered the idea he was almost pitifully anxious to prove his loyalty to Holliday. The only thing was that in learning that he got it into his head that he was not to snarl at or try to sink his teeth in any man.

That was possibly why Holliday was disappointed when he took the dog grimly downstream and made his inquiries as to

who had come down in the two weeks after Carson's murder. He found the names of every arrival, and he grimly pursued every one who might have been the man he was looking for. Each one had a plausible tale to tell. Most of them were known and could prove their whereabouts at the time of Carson's death. But enough had trapped or wintered inland near their claims to make the absence of any explanation at all no proof of guilt. That was where Cheechako was to come in.

Always, before his grim interrogation was over, Holliday unobtrusively allowed Cheechako to draw near. Cheechako had known the man who had been with Carson when he was murdered. Holliday watched him closely. He would sniff at the man, glance up at his master, and wag his tail placatingly. Holliday watched for some sign of recognition. Cheechako grew to consider it a part of the greeting of every man his master met. That was the difference between them. Cheechako simply did not understand. He had already forgotten a great deal of what had happened to him, and Holliday was his master now. Carson was a dim and misty figure of the past.

By the time Holliday actually came upon the man of whom he was in search, Cheechako considered the little ceremony a part of the scheme of things, not to be deviated from.

They found him camping alone, after trailing him for two days.

"Howdy," said he, looking up from his fire with its sizzling pan of beans and bacon.

"Howdy," said Holliday curtly. "You came down-river about a month ago?"

The man bent forward over his fire. Cheechako, watching patiently, saw his whole figure stiffen.

"I come down, yes," said the camper, stirring his beans. Sweat came out on his forehead, but he made no movement toward a weapon. He was not the sort to fight anything out.

"Know Sam Carson?" demanded Holliday.

"Hm—" said the camper. "Seems like I knew him once in Nome."

His eyes rested on Cheechako, and flicked away. Cheechako knew that he was recognized and he wagged his tail tentatively, but he had changed allegiance now. He waited to see what Holliday would do.

"Stop at his cabin?" demanded Holliday grimly.

"Nope," said the camper. "What's up?"

"Pup!" said Holliday.

This was Cheechako's cue. Holliday did not know what Carson had called him, and "Pup" had been a substitute. Knowing, then, what Holliday expected of him and anxious to do nothing of which his master would not approve, Cheechako



went forward and sniffed politely at the man's legs. He rather expected some sign of recognition. When it came, Cheechako would respond as cordially

as was consonant in a dog who belonged to someone else. But the man who had stayed with Carson made no move whatever, though his smell to Cheechako was the smell of a thing in deadly fear.

Cheechako glanced up at Holliday, and wagged his tail placatingly.

"He don't seem to know you," said Holliday grimly. "I guess you didn't."

They camped with the stranger, then, and he told Holliday that his name was Dugan and that he was a placer man, and told stories at which Holliday unbent enough to smile faintly.

Holliday was grim and silent, these days, because he had a man-hunt on his hands, and the gold dust that was to have made a certain girl happy had been stolen by the murderer of his friend. He listened abstractedly to Dugan's jests, but mostly he brooded over the death of his friend and his own hopes in the same instant.

Cheechako lay at the edge of the circle of firelight and watched the two men. Mostly he watched Holliday, because Holliday was his master, but often his eyes dwelt puzzledly on Dugan. He knew Dugan, and Dugan knew him. Vaguely, a dim remembrance arose, of Dugan in Carson's cabin, feeding him a sweet and pleasant-tasting liquid out of a bottle while he laughed uproariously. Yes, Cheechako remembered it distinctly. He wondered if Dugan had any more of that pleasant stuff.

Once he rose and started forward tentatively. Dugan had been smelling quite normally human, but as Cheechako drew near him he again smelled like something that is afraid. It puzzled Cheechako. He sniffed and would have gone nearer but

first, of course, he looked at Holliday. And Holliday merely glanced at him and did not notice. Cheechako was used to such ignoring. He wagged his tail a little and went back outside the firelight. His master did not want him near.

But later that night, when the two men lay rolled in their blankets in the smoke of the smudge fire, Cheechako went thoughtfully forward again. He began to nudge Dugan's kit with his nose. There might be some of that sweet-tasting liquid.

Holliday awoke and sat up with a start. The other man had not gone to sleep.

"What the hell's your dog doing in my kit?" he demanded hysterically.

"We'll see," said Holliday. His voice had a curious edge to it.

Cheechako sniffed about. There was something there that had a familiar odor. He drew in his breath in a long and luxurious smell. Then he began to scratch busily.

"I'll take a look at that," said Holliday grimly.

He went to where Cheechako scratched, while Dugan moved cautiously among his blankets. The firelight glinted momentarily on polished metal among the coverings. The metal thing was pointed at Holliday's back, though it trembled slightly.

Holliday looked up.

"Your bacon," he said, his tone altered. "Get out!" he ordered Cheechako.

Cheechako went away after wagging his tail placatingly. Presently he curled up and slept fitfully, the odor he had sniffed permeating all his dreams. The odor was that of Carson, and Cheechako dreamed of times in the cabin when Dugan was there. Holliday, too, composed himself to slumber, but Dugan lay awake and shivered. Some of Carson's possessions were in the kit Cheechako had nosed at, and though he had had his revolver on Holliday, Dugan was by no means sure he could have summoned the nerve to kill him. He had killed Carson in a fashion peculiarly his own which did not require that he discharge the weapon himself. But now he debated in a panicky fear if he had not better shoot Holliday sleeping. It would be dangerous down here, not like the hills at all. But it might be best. If that damned dog kept sniffing around—

The next morning he cursed in a species of hysterical relief when he saw Cheechako trotting soberly away behind his master. Cheechako wagged his tail politely in parting. He did not understand why Dugan had feigned not to remember him. Now

they were going to find another man, and Holliday would expect him to sniff that man's legs and look up and wag his tail. It was a ceremony that was part of the scheme of things. Cheechako simply remembered Dugan as a man who had stayed a long time with Carson in the cabin upriver, and had fed him sweet liquid out of a bottle, and now smelled as if he were afraid.

But Holliday, of course, did not know that. Otherwise he would have been burying Dugan by this time, with a grimly satisfied look upon his face.

IV

FAR off in the wilderness where the cedars meditated beside a deserted cabin, a faint rumbling murmur set up again. Of course it might have been the wind in the trees, or a minor landslide in the hills not many miles away, or even a giant spruce tree crashing thunderously to the earth. But it lasted just a bit too long for such a simple explanation. To a fanciful hearer, it might have sounded as if the mill of the forest god were grinding its grist again.

And just as such an idea would demand, many unrelated things began to happen which bore obscurely upon the murder of a man now buried deeply beneath a deeply-carved wooden cross.

Holliday, for instance, received two letters. One was from the girl who loved him. One was from the dead man, stained and dragged with long journeying and much forwarding and months on its travels. The letter from the girl told him pitifully that she loved him and wanted to be near him, and offered to come and share any trial or hardship rather than endure the numbing pain of separation. Holliday, of

course, knew better than to take her at her word.

The other letter was very short:

Dear Bob:

I'm sending this down by a Chillicoot buck what stopped to ask for some matches.

The claim is proving up kind of a bonanza because I already took out near twenty thousand in dust which makes a damn big poke for you with what you got me to keep for you. You better look out or I'll steal it. Ha, ha.

I got me a new dog that I call Cheecha-



ko. He's a pretty good dog an' I got a feller to help me out until you come back an' he's taut the pup to drink molasses out of a bottle. You out to see it.

*Well, no more until next time. Yrs,
Sam.*

And the man who had come down the river trail and left Cheechako chained to starve these many long moons past; he found himself growing short of cash and lacking an easier way to recoup his fortunes, decided to do some placer work himself. When he worked with Sam Carson he had marked down a likely spot, but did not trouble to work it because he could attain to wealth so much more simply. Just a bullet that he need not even fire himself. He took canoe and went paddling up the river, having a winter's supplies bundled up in the bow.

Then the mill stopped again, and again for lack of grist to grind. Doubtless the forest god to whom it belonged went on about his other affairs.

V

CHEECHAKO slept within the cabin that winter, stretched out before the fire and soaking the heat into his body with the luxurious enjoyment that only a dog can compass. There was no need for the discipline that before had made his chaining necessary. Holliday's training had had better results than Carson's. Cheechako was a well-mannered dog, now, who listened soberly when Holliday talked to him.

And Holliday talked often. Loneliness in the wilds is quite different from loneliness anywhere else. With the snow piled in monster drifts about the cabin, so that there was an actual tunnel a good part of the way from the door to the wood-pile, he was utterly isolated from the world. He had to talk. He told Cheechako confidentially just what the girl Outside meant to him. He would not have said it to any living man, but the dog listened soberly. Sometimes Holliday grew morose. Sometimes he called himself a fool for not bringing her with him—and then gave thanks that he did not. And he had moments of passionate jealousy and doubt, wondering if she were waiting for him and believing in him through all the months when no word from either could reach the other.

He read her last letter into tiny fragments, long after he could recite it word for word. He read strange meanings into

it, as that she began to feel her loyalty wavering and in honesty wished to place it beyond recall. And then he read them out again and was bitterly ashamed that such things had entered his mind at all. All this was during the days of storm when he could not even build monster fires and thaw out gravel to be shifted where the first waters of spring would wash out its infinitesimal proportion of gold for him.

But Dugan appeared at the cabin in December.

He came on snowshoes and had conquered his first surprise before he shouted outside the cabin door. Dugan had come over in hopes of finding some stray reading-matter, anything to break the monotony of his own cabin some four miles or more away. The smoke warned him that someone was within and no more than a flicker of his eyelids expressed surprise that Holliday was the occupant.

Holliday greeted him with a feverish cordiality, pressed tobacco upon him, bade him remain and eat, presented Cheechako and they talked interminably. Dugan was jollity itself. He was soon assured that Holliday had no suspicion of him. He had left no clue after the murder and Cheechako—who might have gamboled about him—had been trained by Holliday into the perfection of canine manners. Cheechako remembered, yes, but he did not associate Dugan with the death of his former master. And in any event he was a dog, and there was but one master in the world for him. Injuries done to a past owner would not arouse Cheechako now, though he would fight to the last drop of his blood for Holliday. Dugan had every reason in the world to feel secure.

He was secure. In his gratitude for having someone to talk to, Holliday would have welcomed the devil himself. When Dugan finally left for his own cabin, Holliday was more nearly normal than for months.

And it may be that Dugan's presence kept Holliday sane that winter. He was surely used to loneliness, but no such loneliness as possessed him now. No man is lonely who can keep his brain busy with the things of the moment and the place he is in, but Holliday could not do that. A picture of the girl who waited for him was always at hand. His presence and his desperate work was due to her. He could not help thinking and dreaming of her, and that thinking and dreaming made the solitude into a corroding horror.

Dugan changed all that. He was some-

one to talk to. Holliday even told him about the girl. He talked for hours about her, while Cheechako lay at one side of the cabin floor and watched gravely, his ears alert and his eyes somber. Often he watched Dugan, and vague memories crept disturbingly about his mind. Here, in this same cabin—

Dugan knew about the murder, too, how Holliday had come joyously to the cabin—and found his best friend murdered and his happiness destroyed in the one instant. Sam Carson had been the keeper of most of Holliday's possessions, and they had been stolen by the murderer.

It was probably his own feigned sympathy and secret sardonic amusement that suggested a duplication of his former feat to Dugan. Dugan's own claim was rich—how rich he could not tell until spring. But Holliday's claim was little worse. Carson had skimmed the cream, but the rest was worth taking, if it could be done without risk.

And Dugan, who had not nerve enough to shoot a man in cold blood, and was too cowardly to pick a fight, grinned obscurely to himself. He fingered his own pokes, which would be bulging when spring came. He thought of Holliday's. And then he began to whittle out a little contrivance of wood and leathern thongs, which looked very much like a trap, but was much more deadly. It was a clever little idea of his own. Perfectly safe, and absolutely no risk. Suddenly, he stooped and listened. It seemed as if some noise to which his ears were unconsciously attuned had suddenly ceased.

Maybe the mill had stopped again.

VI

AND then spring came. From the trees came cracklings as their coatings of sleet and solidified snow were stripped off and fell melting to the earth below. From the river came minor rumblings as the thawed streams of the mountains poured their waters into it, and its surface ice, grown thinner, cracked across and spun downstream in crumbling icepans toward the sea. The rocks, from hooded things in dazzling cerements, peered out naked and glistening like newborn seals at the world that was stirring for its feverish growth of summer. The spruce buds swelled to bursting. Slowly dwindling patches of snow disclosed inconspicuously green grass prematurely sprouted. And the wild things seemed to awake. Bull caribou roared their chal-

lenges in the indefinite distance. Foxes moved about, keen and joyously savage, no longer hampered by the snow. Now and then the winter's windrift above some hidden hollow stirred, and a peevish bear emerged from his long sleep, sleepily ferocious.

And Holliday worked like a madman. All day long he shoveled his gravel and dirt into the cradle through which a small stream ran. After the first few days he sang. It might be that he would not have a sum that would satisfy him, but he would squander some of it and see the girl who loved him. He would see her and speak to her again! It was no wonder that he sang.

And Dugan? He worked, too, and his eyes glistened at the size of his clean-ups. He filled one poke, then another, and still another as time went on. But Dugan would never be satisfied with what was his own. He went over to Holliday's cabin now and then, and listened while Holliday told him excitedly of the miracle that would happen. He was going Outside! In a little while longer. He would see the girl.

He told the whole course of his progress to the man who had murdered his friend, while Cheechako sat between his feet and regarded Dugan speculatively. Cheechako could not understand why Dugan so consistently ignored him. It seemed illogical to the dog, because he remembered that in this same cabin—

And at last Holliday came back from the cradle, singing at the top of his voice.

Cheechako had caught some of his festive spirit and danced clumsily about him. Dugan was sitting on the bench before the cabin and his eyelids flickered when



Holliday came into view.

"I'm through!" shouted Holliday, at sight of his visitor. "Dugan, I'm through! I'm going down-river in the morning with a fat poke in my pack to see the most wonderful girl in the world!"

Dugan grinned. He had been at the cabin for some little time, and there was a surprise he had prepared for Holliday inside. It was the same surprise he had prepared for Carson.

"I'm going down tomorrow myself," he said. "Closed up my shack and quit my workings."

"We'll celebrate," said Holliday exuberantly. "Man! I'm going Outside to the most wonderful——"

Cheechako sniffed the air in the cabin. Dugan did not smell normally human. He smelled as if he were afraid. And yet he was grinning and cracking jokes as if he shared in Holliday's uproarious happiness.

Cheechako continued to be puzzled and to grow more puzzled. Two or three times he cocked up his ears as if listening to a faint rumbling murmur far off in the wilds which might have been anything—even the mill of a forest god, grinding the grist of men's destinies. But mostly he watched the two men.

Dugan produced a bottle, long hoarded, but Holliday would not touch it. He wanted to stay awake, he said, that no atom of his wonderful good luck should go untasted to the full. He would be starting downstream at daybreak. And Dugan grinned, and drank himself.

Holliday began to cook a festive meal. The smells were savory and delicious, but Cheechako's nose suddenly attracted him to an unusual spot. He went tentatively toward Holliday's bunk. Being a well-mannered dog, he knew he should never climb upon his master's bed, but something drew him there irresistibly. He sniffed, and Dugan's smell was suddenly that of a thing in deadly fear. Cheechako turned his head and regarded him puzzledly. Dugan's scent was on his master's blankets, too, and Dugan had no business to be there. Cheechako sniffed, bewildered. This other odor——

"There's just one thing," said Holliday with a sudden wistful gravity. "Old Sam's dead. I told you how he was murdered. I wish—well, I wish he was going Outside with me."

The faint rumbling outside that sounded like millstones grinding grew suddenly loud and harsh, as if the stones were crumbling up the last stray grains that had been fed to them. Cheechako cocked his ears, but that was only a noise. There was a queer smell on his master's bunk. He heaved up his forepaws to sniff it more nearly.

"Cheechako!" snapped Dugan. Dugan had gone suddenly pale, and more than ever he had the smell of fear about him.

Holliday lifted his head and a curious expression came upon his face. Dugan

went over and took Cheechako by the collar.

"Shedding fleas on your bunk," he said to Holliday, grinning. "But he ought to share in the celebration, too. Got any molasses?"

He knew, of course. He reached up and took down the bottle of syrup Holliday had saved as a supreme luxury.

"Taught a dog to do this once," grinned Dugan. "Here, you, Cheechako! Open your mouth!"

Cheechako sniffed at his leg. Then he saw the bottle. His eyes danced. Dugan had remembered at last! He jumped up to lick eagerly.

"Ho!" roared Dugan, as Cheechako struggled frantically to coax out the sticky sweet stuff faster than it would flow. "I knew you'd like it! Watch him, Holliday!"

Holliday straightened up.

"You've never heard me call that dog 'Cheechako,'" he said queerly. "I've always called him 'Pup.' The only other man who'd know his name would be Sam Carson and——" Holliday's voice changed swiftly—"and the man who killed him! And that trick—— By God, you're Sam Carson's murderer!"

His revolver flashed out. Dugan gasped. The bottle fell to the floor and Cheechako lapped eagerly at its exuding contents.

"You shot him from behind," said Holliday savagely. "With your gun not a foot from his head! Get out that gun now, Dugan. I give you just two seconds!"

Dugan's teeth chattered. His eyes darted despairingly to the bunk. Holliday's face was like stone. There was no faintest trace of mercy in it. With a sudden squeal like that of a cornered rat, Dugan rushed for him.

And Holliday's revolver was out and in his hand, but Dugan's open-handed attack brought an instinctive response in kind. His free fist shot out in a terrific blow. It caught Dugan squarely between the eyes and hurled him backward. He staggered, and his foot crushed Cheechako's paw. The dog leaped up with a yelp and bared teeth and his movement was enough to upset Dugan's balance completely. He toppled backward and a sudden terrible scream filled all the cabin.

He fell against the bunk and his arms clutched wildly, while his face showed only frozen horror. Then he crashed down on the blankets.

And there was a bellowing roar and a

burst of smoke from the bunk. Dugan did not even shudder. He lay quite still. Presently a sullen little "drip-drip-drip" sounded on the floor.

Holliday bent over and pawed among the blankets. He brought out a curious little contrivance, very much like a trap. It was a board with a revolver tied to it and a thong so arranged that pressure on the thong would discharge the revolver into the source of the pressure.

Cheechako sniffed at it. It was the source of the peculiar odor he had noted in his master's bunk. He wagged his tail placatingly and looked up at Holliday.

"Right where my head would have gone," said Holliday, shuddering a little



in spite of himself, "when I lay down to sleep. And he was going to stay here overnight. I see how he killed Carson now. Pfagh!"

Sick with disgust, and a little shaken, he flung down the board.

Holliday did not go down-river at day-break. It was nearer noon when he

started. And instead of one deeply-carved cross in the ground about the cabin there were two. One read:

SAM CARSON
MURDERED
JUNE 2, 19—

And the other:

HIS MURDERER
JUNE 2, 19—

Holliday paddled down the river with Cheechako in the bow of his canoe, looking with bright and curious eyes at all that was to be seen. Holliday had the gold that he had washed out himself during the winter. He had, besides, gold taken from Dugan's pokes to the amount that Dugan had stolen. The surplus he had scattered in the river. He did not want it. He was going Outside to the girl who had waited for him.

And the mill? Oh, the mill had ground up all its grist. It stopped, until one day a half-breed killed a white man in some dispute over an Indian woman, and the echo of the shot traveled thinly over the wilds. And then a faint rumbling murmur set up which might, of course, have been the wind in the trees, or a landslide in the hills not so very far away. But, equally, of course, it might not.

MUTINY AT FIVE BELLS!

AT SEA each day is divided into four-hour watches, commencing at midnight. The ship's bell strikes each half-hour, eight "bells" to the watch. At twelve-thirty A.M. "one bell" is struck; at one o'clock "two bells"—and so until four o'clock brings "eight bells." The watch between four P.M. and eight P.M. is further divided into those famed institutions coming from time immemorial and that are so puzzling to landsmen—the "first and second dog-watches."

In the beginning, tradition has it, the universal system of bell-striking included eight bells for this period—four P.M. to eight P.M.—as for any other. In the American Navy this is so to-day, but not in the English, nor in its imitator, the Japanese. For, says tradition, once a mutiny was planned upon a British man-o'-war in the South Seas with the following results:

One of the conspirators weakened and disclosed the plan to an officer. He said that the crew, upon the appointed day, at "five bells of the second dog-watch," would mutiny. Warned, the captain hurried away a junior officer to ask aid of the nearest naval vessel. But assistance might not come in time. Autocrat of the quarterdeck, a British commander might hasten this detail of ship-work, delay that one, but the march of the hours was beyond even his hand.

However, he was a resourceful man, a natural psychologist. The mutineers-to-be waited. Eight bells of the appointed day—four o'clock; the "afternoon-watch" was ended. Four-thirty; one bell of the first dog-watch; so to four bells. Tension increased, for mutiny carries the death-penalty. Six-thirty; the men crouched as the bell struck—struck *one bell!* Only once it clanged. With this inexplicable shattering of immemorial custom the crew fell almost into panic.

There was no mutiny, for none knew whom to trust, what to expect. Seven o'clock, which by immutable custom must be six bells, was two bells. Seven-thirty, three bells; eight o'clock, four bells. Then eight-thirty, and it was one bell as it always had been. Aid came in time, thanks to the commander's device, and so, tradition says, this improvised scheme of bell-striking during the dog-watches became the universal British system, as it is to-day.



THE MASQUE OF TRAGEDY

By ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD

Author of "Ali In the Night's Work," (with George Bronson-Howard) "Blind Blue Men," etc.

EVEN A DETECTIVE ON A HOLIDAY MAY JOIN THE MAD MASQUERS OF NEW ORLEANS AT CARNIVAL TIME. YET EVEN THERE MYSTERY AND TRAGEDY MAY HAUNT HIS HOURS OF PLAYTIME—AND NO MAN MAY ESCAPE HIS DESTINY

WITH a little sigh of satisfaction, Clinton Braithwait leaned back as far as he could without losing his precarious balance, and squinted happily at the study of the picturesque courtyard his last brush stroke had completed. Then his glance lifted from the picture and roved over the scene it portrayed—rosed-tinted walls covered with fig vine, balconies, blue and green, now faded to exquisitely tender tones, butter-colored oil jars, dripping clusters of purple flowers, a banana tree and two oleanders, trenchantly green against the low, open patterned brick wall at the far end of the garden, where presided a gaudy Madonna in a niche above a gurgling fountain. Beautiful, peaceful, fragrant.

The peculiar, brooding charm that is New Orleans, the New Orleans of the vieux Carré—the old French and Spanish quarter—permeated this, the home of Mesdemoiselles Bébé and Roxanne Dumontel. The artist turned quickly at the sound of footsteps under the echoing arch behind him that opened on the street. There approached a handsome middle-aged citizen of New Orleans, slender, quick of movement, mobile of countenance.

"Hello," said the newcomer, with hardly

a trace of French accent. "How did you manage it?"

"Manage what, Thiery?" said Braithwait, grinning a welcome.

"To get Mlle. Bébé's permission to paint this courtyard. She's sicked the dog on more artists than you can count, for daring so much as to shoot a covetous glance at her pet banana tree. You must have hypnotized her. Roxanne, she is amiable, but Bébé—oh, la, la!"

Braithwait removed the canvas, set it against the wall and proceeded to unlimber the collapsible easel.

"Vamped the dog first, and then an extraordinary lady, whether she is Bébé or Roxanne I haven't the honor of knowing. But she's sixty and dresses in sprigged muslin."

"That's Bébé, right enough. Roxanne is the elder, but she looks ten years younger—fact is, poor Mlle. Bébé isn't more than thirty-five, if she's that. Hers is a queer story and a sad one."

Gaston Thiery started guiltily as the creaking of a board and the sweep of a raised Venetian blind warned them of the approach of the subject of their talk.

"Bon jour, mam'selle," called Thiery, advancing quickly into the center of the garden. "I see you have raised the em-

bargo in favor of my friend, Monsieur Braithwait. Be careful, mademoiselle, he is a dangerous charmer."



The woman, a miniature creature, smiled down upon her visitors and leaned her crossed arms on the balcony rail. "What would you?" she asked with the tiniest of tiny shrugs. "He comes in, your friend, he implores, he cajoles. I am not of stone. If it were not for my fiancé, I might be foolish—but as it is, I feel safe enough to give him the permission." She had the dried look of a withered rosebud; her small features were finely wrinkled, as if a cobweb had been laid over them; her large, heavily pouched black eyes were feverishly bright; her voice, drawing in her soft Creole speech, had withal a curious sharpness, the pitch of strained nerves.

Braithwait joined his friend under the balcony. "I am very grateful, I assure you, mademoiselle, and I shall avail myself often of the privilege you were so gracious to give. There are a dozen angles of your charming garden, every one an inspiration."

"Of a surety, come when you wish—Ah, Roxanne is calling me. *Bon jour*, messieurs." She waved a blue-veined hand and hurried into the house.

"My compliments—a complete conquest," laughed Thiery. "Are your labors ended? Then come with me to the Guiries', and we will lunch."

Braithwait nodded agreement, gathered his paraphernalia and followed his friend out into the sun-drenched street.

"Her fiancé?" he said in a puzzled tone. "Is that dear little old thing engaged?"

"That's part of the story," said Thiery. "Wait till we are settled with a table between us and I'll tell you the whole thing.

It's worth listening to. You'd never guess, for instance, that that piece of Dresden China had been in jail, now would you?"

"I wouldn't and I don't," said Braithwait flatly. "I've been a detective long enough to know criminal earmarks when I see them. That woman is as innocent as a child—I'd bet on it."

"And keep your money," Gaston agreed. "She is innocent and a child, but—here we are. I'll order because I know what and how, and then I'll relieve your curiosity." He summoned a waiter, held a confidential conversation, and having arranged things to his satisfaction, slumped into his chair and leaned across the table.

"This all happened about fifteen years ago. At the time it made a tremendous stir, for Mlle. Bébé was the prettiest thing in ten counties then, all eyes and enameled skin, and a mouth as red as a chili pepper. She certainly was a belle, beaux in rows, but she wouldn't look at one of 'em until along comes a rank outsider, an added starter, a dark horse in the race. A quiet spoken, slim, good-looking chap he was. Nobody knew anything about him. He said he came from New York, and his name was Jack Creel. He seemed to have plenty of money, and he was stopping at the St. Charles Hotel. Well, as it came about, Mlle. Bébé and Roxanne and a dozen or so escorts go to the races one fine day, and from her box Bébé looks down and sees this Creel, and he looks up and sees Bébé. Bang!—they're off! How they managed to meet Bébé never would tell. You know how carefully guarded are our girls of the old French families, but love will find the way, and they found theirs. First we began hearing rumors that they were seen together at strange places and stranger hours. In the dusk of the Cathedral at twilight, they were stumbled on by one of the devout gossips. Stepping out of the dining-room at Antoinette's they were marked by the *bon vivants*. Driving in mysterious barouches, by any and all who cared to look—that sort of thing. I was a bit hurt myself—a little bit sentimental about Bébé, to tell the truth. How my sisters 'Oh'd and 'Ah'd and gossiped.



However, it ended by Bébé's announcing that she is engaged. And, of course, that's a terrible breach of etiquette, and the whole Dumontel connection fall upon this Creel and demanded his pedigree, and any excuse he may have for being alive.

"He's got a pretty good bank balance, it seems, and is very vague as to ancestry. All the Dumontels and the Chaberts and the Dequenes are wild. But Bébé just beams. They're going to be married, and then to Paris to live. The nine days' wonder passes by, and then he goes North to settle up his affairs. What happened next, of course, didn't come out until afterward. But it was like this: He writes her from New York that he has a surprise in store for her. She is to tell no one, but he will be in New Orleans just one night. It's Carnival time. If a masquer climbs her wall at twelve o'clock of a certain night, she is not to be frightened. It will be—"guess who?" All very romantic.

"Sure enough, she's in the garden—I don't mean the courtyard where you were painting, but the garden that makes the corner of Esplanade, and is shut off from it by a good seven foot high brick wall, with a little green door on the side street. There she waits, palpitating. In comes the masked lover, and well—one can imagine it. Moonlight, distant music, tin horns, confetti, Carnival. He puts into her hands a pearl necklace—an astounding thing, the sort that wraps three or four times around the throat and then hangs to the waist. They are big, evenly matched pearls, a wonder string. He tells her it is an heirloom, his one great treasure. When they are in Paris he will sell it and they will have a fortune. She is to tell no one, not even sister Roxanne, not a word. It is their secret.

"Her family have treated him shabbily he explained, had more than hinted that he was a fortune-hunting pauper. He didn't choose to pander to their greed. Let them think what they chose. It was his little vengeance. Let her hide his treasure and keep it very, very carefully, unsuspected of anyone. He would leave for the North in the morning, and make his official appearance a week or ten days later, for the wedding. And poor Bébé is such an innocent little love-sick ninny that every word is gospel, and her Jack the most marvellous poetic figure. And, of course,

girl-like, she can't stand having those divine pearls in her possession and not showing them. So what does she do but wear them to the Carnival Ball.

"At first everyone takes it for granted that they are just Mardi Gras paste, so she gets annoyed at that, and acts so mysteriously that pretty soon the story goes from lip to lip that this is the gift of the groom-to-be. And from that, the few people at the ball who really are experts and can tell the real from the imitation however good, spot that necklace as being something priceless. The length of it, the unusual size of the pearls, perfectly matched, make it something quite unique—and presto! the fat's in the fire.

"A few days, nearly a week later, a detective arrives from the North. Mr. Jack Creel has been located and arrested. The pearls answer to the description given by Mrs. Charling Bullard, of Washington, of her stolen jewels. Mr. Creel, it turns out, is wanted for a whole series of robberies.

"With her world crumbling about her ears, Mlle. Bébé refuses to believe. She refuses to divulge the whereabouts of the necklace. She repeats his statement to her, that the pearls are his, an heirloom. Nothing can move her. She changes her story a dozen times—she's given the pearls to a messenger; she doesn't know where they are, the string she wore to Carnival ball was only a lot of cheap beads she had bought, and strung herself. She believes absolutely in her fiancé. He is a persecuted angel. She will stand by him forever. And stand by him she did.

"She is searched, the house is searched.



She is called an accessory after the fact, and in spite of the whole Dumontel clan, they put Bébé in jail. She goes quite

cheerfully, with her poodle and her negro maid, and her little portable altar and her special chocolate pot. And the pearls never were found from that day to this. They've never been seen. But her devotion and faith couldn't save Creel. There was too much against him. They couldn't prove the Bullard robbery on him, but they didn't need that one. Bébé was in jail when his trial came on. They brought her up North and faced her with him in hopes she'd break down, but she didn't, merely said, as she always had, that she loved him and believed in him; insisting that all the accusations against him were lies. She even accused her revered aunts and uncles—she and Roxanne were orphans—of committing perjury and joining in a conspiracy to break up her marriage. She was the despair of everyone, friend, foe and family. He was given a long sentence. There was a terrible scene in court. She had literally to be torn from him, they say, and he broke down and cried like a child.

"From then on, poor Mlle. Bébé began to fail. At first it was melancholia. When he died of pneumonia a year later in prison, they tried to keep it from her. But she found out. A convict, who had made friends with Creel in prison, wrote her about it, presumably at the dying man's request. She nearly died, too, but she pulled through, and then—suddenly she became cheerful and happy. She was waiting for him to come. She thought that he had just gone North to settle his affairs and was coming in a few days, and then they'd be married. She's perfectly sane on all other matters, but in this she's just gone back and stayed as matters were before the catastrophe. But she's grown old in jumps, as you might say, just withering away, but happy always, looking forward to her wedding day. Her gown has been hanging in her closet, they tell me, for fifteen years, and she is always ordering orange blossoms from the florists. They all know her and respectfully take her orders and fail to fill them. But Roxanne gave her a wax wreath under glass, and she's quite content with that. Poor little Mlle. Bébé! The sight of her always goes to my heart. Why couldn't she have lavished all that faith and love on somebody worthy of it? Irony of fate. Poor little soul!

"Ah, there comes our quail roasted in yine leaves, see if you don't like them."

But Braithwait hardly glanced at the succulent birds, as they were ceremoni-

ously presented to his attention. "Of course, she's got the pearls cached somewhere," he said thoughtfully, "with this delusion that he is coming and that she is to be married, she would obey his instructions. She is holding them for him. It is their nest egg for the future. But where could she have put them so securely that not in all this searching and overhauling they have never come to light?" He grinned ruefully. "I almost wish, my good Thierry, that you hadn't told me the tale of Mlle. Bébé's love tragedy. I'm on my vacation, and when I'm vacationing I make it a point to be my artist self, pure and simple. I'm supposed to be a painter now, and here you're rousing my sleeping sleuth instinct. Hang it all! I wanted to leave my profession behind me when I came back here. I wanted to be an artist and a gourmet. Let me compliment you, by the way, in your choice in quail in grape leaves; it's a new one on me, but I'll say it's a little bit of all right."



The subject of Mlle. Bébé and the vanishing pearls would not so easily be set aside. As they sipped the last taste of the heavy black Louisiana after luncheon coffee, Braithwait came out of a prolonged reverie.

"Are they sure that the sister Roxanne knows nothing of the whereabouts of the pearls?" he asked.

The white-haired, olive-skinned Thierry opened wide black eyes. His own mind had been traveling back into the past. "Not she. A simple creature, Roxanne. If she had known anything the priest would have learned of it before now. No, she doesn't know—and there is another point of tragedy. Bébé was always devout; when she was a very young girl, she had a notion of taking the veil, but this love affair estranged her from the church. What it must have cost her—*la pauvre!* She still has her plaster saints all over the house, and as I told you, she took her little portable altar to jail with her. However, she seems to have worked out a plan of doing without, as you might say, the middle man. She deals direct with her saints. Of course, in her twisted mind she has the idea of pursuit. She does not dare confide in anything human. Alas, I must confess,

my friend, it is my tragedy, too. I have never married." Thiery rose nervously and reached for his hat. "Allons! If you are painting this afternoon, you had best install yourself before the light begins to change. Since you have forgotten that you are a detective, remember that you are a painter."

"You're right," agreed Braithwait. "I have an appointment this afternoon with the northeast corner of the Cabildo. Good-by, and thank you for all your forms of entertainment. That story and quails in vine leaves, what more could an artist Sherlock want?"

They parted before the door of the little restaurant, and Braithwait took his leisurely way to Jackson Square and the ancient Cabildo.

BUT in spite of the lure of warm color, architectural felicities and linear perfections, his mind would travel back to the vision of the tiny dried rosebud woman, leaning with crossed arms on the gallery rail, looking down with feverishly bright black eyes, at the faithful lover while she talked of a fiancé, dead long ago, of whose passing she had only the message written by a fellow convict. Perhaps heaven in its mercy had blanked out the sorrows, leaving her the happy illusion of expectancy forever.

When he left the quiet of the interior court of the old prison, it was to meet the blast of playing bands. The streets were full of hurrying people, men and women in tinsel and rainbow colors, crowded taxis from which fluttered the Carnival colors of purple, yellow and green. Dusk was hovering in the sky, and the myriad electric lights swung above across the wide thoroughfare, made a golden haze in the misty atmosphere. The contrast of the stillness of the prison yard and the gathering festivity of the street was startling. Why not play truant himself? The next day would bring the finale, the mad climax. The license of Mardi Gras made every man and woman abroad in the jostling throng a possible acquaintance, a friend and companion, maybe for an hour or the night long, or a lifetime—who knew? Braithwait ducked out of the crowd and into a costumer's. There was little left for choice, but he bought a cheap suit of the black and white of Pierrot, a black skull cap and a supply of grease paint and powder.

For that night and half the next day Braithwait disappeared from the earth,

and another Pierrot had joined the black and white army that danced in and out of



house, club and café. Dawn found him and a motley crew of bedraggled merry-makers on the shores of the lake. A breakfast at the Bungalow, topped off by a taxi race into town that avoided disaster by a miracle. It was nearly noon, and Rex had taken the city keys in his keeping, when the thought of his room, a bath and a shave loomed up as the three things most to be desired in a topsy-turvy world. Without the formality of a leave-taking, Braithwait abandoned the remains of the party and sought his hotel. The streets were littered with serpentine and confetti, sodden and mired with the trappings of the mob. The wires across the streets and the crisscrossed lines of light bulbs, were dripping with colored ribbon, like Spanish moss of a live oak. The streets were nearly deserted of masquers now. The idea of rest and recuperation against the festivities to be renewed with the afternoon had penetrated to the weary minds and tired feet of the quondam revelers.

Braithwait glanced up the marble flight of stairs leading into the hotel, as he paid his cab fare, and stopped open-mouthed. By the center pillar stood Gaston Thiery. His skin was ashen, his face drawn in hard lines of anxiety and pain, his eyes deep sunken and filled as if with a film of withheld tears. The man was a wreck! Forgetting his disguise, Braithwait rushed up to his friend, seizing his shoulder almost roughly.

"In heaven's name, what's wrong with you, man?" he demanded.

"Braithwait!" Thiery gasped. "Thank God! I've been waiting for you since

seven o'clock. Been to your room—asked everywhere. Quick; quick, come with me—at once."

The detective became suddenly aware of his bedraggled finery. "Let me get this confounded stuff off. What's happened?"

"Never mind, come as you are. Here, taxi!" Thiery gripped the detective's arm with nervous fingers that dug into the flesh as he thrust his reluctant companion into the vehicle, and gave the Dumontel address to the driver.

Braithwait started. "Where? The Dumontels? What's wrong there?"

The car had started. Thiery leaned forward, covering his face with his hand. He was crying. Great scalding tears slipped between his fingers. Shocked and puzzled, Braithwait laid a sympathetic hand on the other's shoulder.

"What is it, *mon vieux*? How can I help? Come, come, get a grip on yourself."

The Frenchman pulled himself together with a tearing effort. "It's Mademoiselle Bébé," he whispered hoarsely. "She's dead—murdered!"

"What!" exclaimed Braithwait. "Murdered! Why? What for? Are you sure?"

"You shall see," said Thiery. "I have held them all off. I made Roxanne insist. The Chief of Police knows of you. I explained who you are. She has not been moved, nothing has been touched—and she so gentle. It is this cursed story of the pearls, I feel sure of it, and yet—but you shall see, you shall see." The little man placed a shaking hand on the limp, soiled folds of the Pierrot ruff. "I trust to you, my friend, to see that this devil is punished. He must be found. The most dastardly, the most cowardly—" he choked.

"I'll do everything I can, you may be sure of that." Braithwait's face was grim beneath its streaked coat of powder and smeared rouge. The cab rattled to the curb. Already a knot of curious neighbors were gathered at the wide entrance under the fan arch where they were held back by a policeman. At a word from Thiery the guardian permitted them to enter the familiar courtyard. All was as sunny calm and softly gay as ever—the red bird in its cage warbled sleepily, the vivid green banana leaves rustled together, whispering.

Thiery led the way up the stairs to the first gallery and knocked on the double doors. Roxanne, a tall, slender woman, who bore herself with dignity in spite of

the ravages of shock and grief, admitted them.

Gaston clasped both her hands in his. "I have brought him. He will give us our one consolation, Roxanne. He will not let her murderer go unpunished. He, of all the world, is the one man I could trust—and he is here."

Miss Dumontel looked at the tattered masquerader without surprise. "They have waited, monsieur," she said gravely. "The coroner is here, and the police. They all knew her—she was the friend of everybody, my poor Bébé." She turned toward a door leading from the salon, which, when opened, revealed a corridor that at its further end, terminated in an iron, festooned balcony that overlooked the garden. Right and left were doors, and a transverse hall ran the entire depth of the old mansion. Before the door to the left of the hall window, sat a blue-coated officer.

"There," said Roxanne, giving a sudden racking sob. "Was it not enough that her life was ruined, that her beautiful mind was broken? And now, *mon Dieu*—this!" She controlled herself. "He will show you, monsieur. I—I cannot. It was I, who found her," she added simply, as she turned away.

The policeman rose, received Thiery's explanation as if expecting it, looked at Braithwait curiously, and, unlocking the door, preceded them into the room. The tall windows stood open, their blue painted shutters folded back. The broad green, varnished leaves of a magnolia tree thrust themselves over the wrought iron balcony railing. The floor was of red tile, the furniture, huge polished mahogany pieces, an immense canopied bed, an armoire of gigantic proportions, a rosewood *prie dieu* drawn up beside the bed. In the middle of the western wall was a small open fireplace, whose shelf was ornamented by a Sevres clock, and two plaster statues of St. Joseph and St. Anthony. On a stand between the windows stood what the investigator recognized as the portable altar, mentioned by Thiery. It was of gilded wood, with painted panels, but the figure that should have stood before it, on the little Gothic pedestal, was not in its place.

Braithwait took in the details of the room before he permitted himself to look at the almost doll-like figure that lay outflung before the opened casements. Then he went close and knelt down beside it. Mlle. Bébé was miraculously young in death. She looked a girl again, the fine web of wrinkles that had covered her face

like a veil, blurring her features, was gone, wiped away, leaving them chiseled and



cameo-like. She was dressed in an elaborate negligée, such as a Creole bride of fifteen years ago would inevitably have selected for her trousseau. Her almost white hair fell in soft curls about the still brow. She looked, not old, not even her years, but like some powdered-haired belle of the eighteenth century. The black lashes that swept her cheeks and the dark arches of her brows enhanced the illusion.

Carefully, after closely examining the corpse, the detective lifted it in his arms. The cause of death was instantly apparent. The neck was broken. She had fallen, or been thrown with great violence, her head striking on the stone lintel of the French window. The two brass sunken sockets that received the old-fashioned closing rods operated by the turning of the door-like knob, were directly at the base of the skull. Death had been instantaneous. He laid her gently back, and rose from her side. His gaze traveled out to the stone-floored balcony with its hand-wrought delicate iron railings. He stepped over the dead hands that seemed to bar his passage. The balcony, as he had surmised, ran the entire length of the house, overhanging the garden. A trellis covered with vines came up nearly to its base, forming an iron pergola. Through the crowding leaves he could make out the forms of green-painted benches and seats below, evidently a little arbor for hot weather relaxation. The high wall that shut the garden from the street was pierced almost directly opposite by a small green door. Once inside the enclosure any agile person could easily climb the trellis, pull himself up and over the railing, and enter the room. If Mlle.

Bébé had been murdered, this was certainly the way her assailant had come. There was proof of it in plain sight—broken tendrils, freshly scraped paint, the heavy imprint of a foot in the moist soil.

Braithwait turned back into the room. Both Thiery and the officer were regarding him expectantly as if they believed him capable of unravelling the mystery at once. Standing still in the middle of the room, he studied all the surroundings once more in detail. There had been no struggle, evidently. Only two things attracted attention in the orderly chamber—the door of the great armoire stood open, revealing a white satin wedding dress, turned ivory with age. Other dresses, sheer embroidered trifles of lawn and mull. Evidently in this wardrobe the bereft bride had stored her trousseau. One hook was empty, evidently the gorgeous wrapper that now clothed the stiffened form, had hung there. Why had she, if frightened in the night by an intruder, put on this treasured, locked away, garment, instead of slipping at once into the handy familiar bathrobe which was by her bed? Little pale blue silken mules were on the waxen feet, the square-toed black kid bedroom slippers stood undisturbed on the wooly knitted mat. But most puzzling clue of all, the only object in the room that was out of place or damaged, was a colored plaster figure of St. Rita. It lay on the floor, broken in three pieces. Braithwait picked up the base and tried it on the empty pedestal of the altar. It fitted exactly. This, then, was the occupant of the little shrine. The statue was hollow. He examined each piece carefully. It had been stuffed with cotton. Here and there on the rough contours of the casting, shreds adhered. He looked at the base once more. It had been crudely sealed with wax, yellow wax, such as votive candles are made of.

He replaced the shards and again made the tour of the room, once more bent above the body and studied its expression, the attitude of the hands, the manner of its position.

"I believe," he said slowly, "she kept the pearls in that statue. Of course, they couldn't find them. She had them with her. I think you told me, Thiery, that even in jail she took her little altar. Do you see," he held a fragment toward him, "the bits of cotton wool clinging there? She packed the inside with it, so the contents wouldn't rattle. She sealed the base with wax candles she bought at the Cath-

dral and brought home with her instead of burning on the altar. There would be nothing to account for that wax. Thus far I think I'm right; but who in the world could know or guess that, after all these years? Who came here to compel her to give them up? And how could he force the secret she had kept against all odds for years. The only person who possibly could have made her tell, the man she loved and who gave the pearls into her keeping—is dead. I confess I don't get it; but someone was here, and someone killed her, though I doubt if that was intentional. She fell, or was thrown. It was the way her head hit the stone lintel and the brass cups."

Thiery's eyes were bitter, hard. "But he killed her, just the same. To kill her was like killing a child. Look how little she is, how helpless!" The tears sprang again to his eyes. "You've got to find the brute. Think, think hard. Things don't just happen. There is a reason for everything. Somebody knew, somebody must have known."

"He came in," Braithwait continued, "either over the wall, or through that green door—but that's a detail. He climbed to the balcony by way of the arbor. He knew which were her windows, for his tracks land over the railing directly in front of them, not further down, which would have been an easier climb, if you look and see. We have to deal with someone who knew. And why is she dressed in that lace negligée? As I read the signs, she wanted to look her best. Could she have expected someone?"

Thiery blanched, his fists clenched. "How dare you?" he snarled. "Were you not my friend—!"

The detective held up a restraining hand. "Remember that we have to deal with a defective reason," he cautioned. "She lived emotionally, as you told me, in the past. You are not to take offense at what I say. You are to try and help me. It is for you to think."

Thiery sobered. "Perhaps Roxanne," he ventured, "but no. I knew as much and more of my poor dear little friend than her sister, and I tell you there is no one. If anyone who was capable of committing this crime had known, then this would have been done long ago—"

"Unless," interrupted the policeman shrewdly, "that person had only just found out—something that mademoiselle herself may have said may have informed this person."

"This person may have signaled to her, given her time to throw on that lace gown. It isn't conceivable that she, a modest, shrinking creature, would have dressed herself before someone already in the room. She must have realized he was there outside, for look, there is a brooch fastened at her neck. She took time to put it on, hurriedly, no doubt—but she dressed. I don't understand it at all." Braithwait thrust his hands deep into the wide pockets of the black and white trousers, hunching up the long blouse from which half of the huge black buttons had been torn away. Pierrrot's black skull cap was awry and his own tawny hair escaped in a yellow halo. Black, white and red had mingled in indescribable confusion on his face. As he raised his eyes, he caught sight of his reflection in the long mirror hung on the inside of the wardrobe door. He started, shrugged and grinned, and then stiffened like a bird dog at point. He stared and his eyes widened. He seemed hypnotized by his own double in the glass. "By God!" he exclaimed. "By God! that's it. I've got it! I know!"

He dashed past his amazed companions, through the salon, where the startled Roxanne rose to meet him, down the steps to



the courtyard and out to the street, breaking through the curious crowd and thrusting aside the policeman on watch. Down the avenue, now beginning to fill again with the gaudy costumes of the fête, he ran like one possessed. Waving aside all delay and interference, he made his way directly to the Chief of Police. That functionary, at first angry and disbelieving, became excitedly convinced, anxiously coöperative. To Braithwait's reiterated demands for immediate action he responded with efficient zeal.

"Are you sure you can pick up his trail?" the detective inquired. "It's not so easy, but he can't have left the city yet, unless he got aboard of some tramp freighter sailing this morning. Have everyone that leaves the mouth of the river overhauled. Send a police boat down immediately."

Orders flew.

Unmindful of his appearance, Braithwait paced the floor.

"How long has he been out? Got long distance? Has he had time to grow a mustache or beard? Are there any distinguishing marks? Has anything happened of recent years that might serve as further means of identification?"

There were delays inevitable, but fretting. At last the required information was forthcoming. Eric Johns had been released on the 18th of January—time off for good behavior. Followed a chart of measurements; a notation as to where fingerprints and photographs were available. There was a white scar in his hair over the left ear. He was known to have gone to friends in Atlanta, Georgia.

"Trail him from there," ordered Braithwait. "They will have had an eye on him at headquarters. At any rate they can verify that he's left. Get busy now, time is precious."

More long distance, and while the sergeant was busy at the task, under Braithwait's nervous directions, plainclothes men, on duty watching the harvesting of the pickpockets convened by Carnival, were called in and despatched north, east, south and west. A description of the wanted man was circulated. With radio rapidity, the dragnet was spread.

"You're right," came the voice of the chief, as he glanced over the shoulder of the man at the telephone who was jotting down in shorthand the words that were pouring over the wire from Atlanta. "He gave them the slip. Got out of town some time last week. They haven't the remotest idea where he went. He'd got a job in a garage, and seemed to be working honestly; lived with his friends, didn't go to any of the hangouts."

"All right," the detective cut in, "tell them to get in touch with the people he stayed with—they may come across with something." He looked at his colleague, suddenly conscious of his bedraggled state.

"You're all in, Mr. Braithwait," the chief said kindly. "You need a bath and a change. I'll send you to your hotel in one of the department cars. There's nothing more you can do now, until we begin to get reports in."

Braithwait looked at his torn and soiled blouse and spattered trousers, no longer white. "Pretty tough looking customer—what? But just the same I'm grateful to these sad rags. I'll tell you why later on, if you haven't guessed it already."

"Guessed what—that you've been forty-eight hours without sleep? I don't have to guess, I know," said the officer.

"Not that at all," said the detective, yawning. "But never mind, you're right. Me for forty winks and some every day clothes. I've had about all of this tragic masquerade that I can use. Put me aboard your dreadnought and pack me home. If anything stirs, wake me up, and for goodness' sake, don't call me unless there is."

Braithwait, as it happened, was allowed all of ten hours of rest before he was called—he was even up and dressed before his telephone rang.

"We've got him," said the voice of the chief over the wire. "Picked him up in New Iberia. Think he was headed west. He won't talk. No trace of pearls. Kelly and Bassee are bringing him back."

"Not in the baggage and not on him, hey?" said Braithwait sharply. "Get a specimen of his handwriting. Go to the post office here in the city and find out what packages were sent out by parcel post, early this morning. It's dollars to doughnuts he's mailed them to himself under another name—somewhere west, since he was headed that way. But don't neglect address in Mexico, either. Probably it's insured—he wouldn't take a chance on losing them. Have them look up registered packages first of all."

"At that, you may be right," came the answer. "I'll have the P. O. combed inside of half an hour. Call you again later."

It was hardly more than the time specified when the bell jangled once more.

"There are three packages registered, between 9 and 11 A. M.," the chief reported. "One to Galveston, one to Los Angeles, and one to San Francisco. We're having all three watched for on delivery. If he's sent them to himself, he won't be there to receive it. But we'll have 'em all held for identification in case he's got



a pal at the other end. All the other stuff that went through unregistered was bulky stuff and from known residents. We've checked up on all the stations."

"Good," approved Braithwait. "My bet is Galveston. Just a hunch, of course, but I think he'll make for a port less conspicuous than San Francisco, and more handy than Los Angeles. However, we mustn't be too sure, our man's no fool."

Braithwait hung up, and, realizing that the hunger that gripped him was the na-

tural result of semi-starvation, betook himself to breakfast. Later he went in search of Thiery and found the little Frenchman in the depths of despair. There was no justice in the world—all his faith in Braithwait's prowess had ebbed.

"I don't blame you," said the detective; "but I'm sure, positive, and it's straight deduction. I'm not just playing a hunch. Poor Mlle. Bébé's ghost is not going to walk, demanding vengeance, though I doubt if she was ever the sort to demand it—" He paused and his eyes had a far away look. "Funny thing—imagination," he said softly. "Do you know I can see what happened last night, as clearly and in detail as if I'd been hidden in that great armoire of hers watching it all. There's only one detail that is still a mystery to me, but that I'll know very soon. I'm going to have the prisoner brought directly to the Dumontel house. He's due in an hour, if he isn't here already. Wait, I'll telephone." He was gone only a few moments, when he returned, he nodded with an air of satisfaction. "Come on, Thiery, let's go. The chief is coming, too." He laid his hand with a comforting gesture on Thiery's bowed shoulder.

Into the silent courtyard, now blurring into the soft shadows of twilight they made their way. The curious crowd had dispersed, only the policeman on duty differentiated the entrance under the ancient doorway from its counterparts up and down the street. Here and there a citizen hurrying home, or a brightly-garbed masquer on his way to dinner, enlivened the thoroughfare.

"He's coming now," said Braithwait, as he caught the distant sound of an approaching patrol wagon.

"We'll go straight to Mlle. Bébé's room. She will confront him."

Roxanne, her dignity broken by the strain, admitted them tearfully. She had been advised by telephone of what was to happen.

"Leave this to us, Mlle. Dumontel," said Braithwait sympathetically; "but rest assured, justice is not going to be cheated this time."

With her handkerchief to her eyes, the bereaved sister motioned them to proceed down the corridor.

On the bed in Mlle. Bébé's virginal room lay the little corpse, so small, so young seeming, like a child asleep. She was dressed in the lace negligée, for in this, Roxanne had decided, Mlle. Bébé was to be buried. At head and foot the soft ra-

diance of many candles glowed. An ebony and silver crucifix lay on the still breast beneath her delicate hands. Through the open window the breeze stole softly, bending the candles' flame. On the floor lay, undisturbed at the detective's orders, the three pieces of the broken statuette of St. Rita. The officer sitting outside the door, saluted respectfully. With a sob, Thiery threw himself on his knees by the bedside, his lips moving in silent prayer.

"What I am going to do," whispered Braithwait, "will be rather spectacular. Don't let it get on your nerves, old man. I'm going to put over a third degree of my own invention, from inside that armoire. When the chief is here, tell him, so the suspect won't hear you. Get him outside. The chances are that the guilty man will be so upset at sight of his victim he won't notice anything else. Listen—I hear them."

He tiptoed to the massive wardrobe, tested its balance and stepped inside. Its depth was sufficient to readily conceal him, behind the pendant clothing and the cardboard boxes he had to push aside. The doors he left ajar.

Thiery rose to his feet, and a moment later, the door to the passage was pushed open and the chief entered. Close behind him, between two uniformed policemen, stumbled a haggard, wild-eyed man. As his gaze fell upon the dead woman he gave a smothered shriek and, had it not been for the men beside him, would have crumpled to the floor.

The chief spoke low, his voice reproachful. "How could you kill a helpless little woman like that?"

The prisoner began to tremble, his handcuffs rattled sharply.

"Eric Johns," said an eerie voice. "Eric Johns!"

The prisoner struggled, twisted, fought; even the men who held him paled.

Thiery, close to the chief, was whispering eagerly.

"And you swore you were my pal," said the voice, "and you used all I told you—to rob her—the woman I loved. You had learned that for love of me, me—Creel—she had lost her reason. You waited till it was Carnival time, till you could come in the disguise and masque I told you I had worn, when I came to her with the pearls. You thought that, seeing you, she would think it was I come again. And for me she would reveal the hiding place of the trust she had kept so long and well."

Half-fainting the accused reeled. His

face was ghastly, sweat poured from his brow. "I didn't kill her. I didn't, I didn't!" he screamed. "She tried to follow me. I threw her down—I didn't know—I didn't know!"

"She thought I had come back to her," the hollow voice went on. "She told you the hiding place. You couldn't wait. You broke the statue, the necklace fell out, the pearls—my pearls—I had gambled my life for. You threw her from you, when she clung, thinking that her lover was leaving her—you!"

"Oh, my God! Listen, I didn't mean to kill her," cried the frantic prisoner. "I did dress as you told me you had that night—in a black Spanish costume with a red cape. She fell for it, yes, and let me in—but I didn't mean to kill her, didn't even know she was dead till now. I thought it out. The pearls weren't no use to her—she was crazy. If she'd died, nobody would have known, they'd 'a' been just lost. Creel, Creel, for the love of God, don't haunt me! You'd 'a' done the same thing yourself, you know you would."

He groveled, his breath came in hoarse rattling gasps.

The cool voice of the chief cut the pause. "What did you do with the loot, Johns?"

"I'll give 'em back, I will," panted the huddled wreck on the floor. "I sent them to Galveston by parcel post, to William Haynes—that's the name I used. I faked stuff to identify myself with. I'll get 'em—I'll send for 'em—but for the love of God, get a priest, and have him lay that ghost. He was my pal, Creel was, and I went back on him. I double-crossed him after he was dead, but so help me, I didn't kill her. She was such a little bit of a thing I just shook her off, and she fell. I didn't even look back, just thought she dropped—so help me, Creel, that's the God's truth." With an unconsciously dramatic gesture he approached the bed and laid his shaking hand on the two quiet ones that lay above the crucifix.

"I do believe you." The impulsive Frenchman spoke for all present. The thief turned his haggard eyes gratefully to his face. "I do believe you," Thierry repeated, "and I loved her."

"Take the prisoner down," said the chief huskily. "I'll join you in a moment."

Between the two guards Eric Johns was led from the room. A moment later Braithwait appeared at the door of the wardrobe and stepped to the floor. Even his steeled nerve was shaken. It showed

in the drawn look about his mouth and eyes.



"Poor devil!" he said at length. "Poor devil—anyway we got the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." He paused, then crossed softly to the window.

"She saw the masquer in the garden," he said dreamily, as one recalling a half-forgotten memory. "He must have called to her, somehow attracted her attention, so she flew to the great armoire, hurried into her beautiful gown, found her satin mules, fastened the lace at her throat with the brooch he had given her, and opened the windows to let him in. Anyway, she had her little moment of happy illusion before she went."

The Chief of Police came up to Braithwait and held out his hand. "You were right every inch of the way. What put you on the trail?"

"The fifteen years' lapse of time," said Braithwait. "If it had been possible for anyone having the requisite knowledge and capable of such a thing to act before, he would have acted. In the second place, when I caught sight of my own reflection in the mirror, I suddenly remembered Thierry's story, of how Creel had warned her the night he brought the pearls, to expect a masquer in her garden. Had anyone known all this and known also the poor woman's delusions, which was a very open secret, there would be ninety-nine chances to a hundred that the imposter would be received with open arms, and the secret of the lost pearls revealed. It would be the only way to break through her habit of secrecy. And, of course, the man who had been Eric John's pal in prison, who had written to the fiancée the particulars of his death, would be the one person in the world who would know in all probability how he had disguised himself on that fateful night, and he would have had to wait fifteen years, until he had served his term to make use of his knowledge. Well, the mystery is cleared. Eric Johns goes back to jail. Mrs. Charling Bullard of Washington, will get the agreeable surprise of her life—and Mademoiselle Bébé has entered into rest. Saint Rita pray for her."



THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

OUTLAW CATTLE

GASTRONOMICALLY speaking, we have cherished vigorous suspicions concerning the service records of many unsuccessful steaks we have met. Tough as rhino hide, some of them were; steaks, too, which bore honored names ranging from flank to plank—ed porterhouse. Hard-bitten critters they had been when roaming the Western range; but yet *harder* after being teamed with French fried upon the kitchen range, and set before us in mockery!

For the first time all such suspicions have been confirmed. On the hoof, those impermeable steaks were roundup-dodgers, horned outlaws of the bunch grass country!

Owen Clarke Treleaven, whose Western story, "Uncle Billy Watson's Job," appears in this issue, reveals the turpitude of these sinewy old steers. He writes:

"The flu left me with what threatens to be a permanent headache, but it has proved an indirect benefit in another fashion. The trips I have made into the mining and cattle countries in search of health certainly have been valuable to me as a writer.

"This last jaunt amounted to living in the midst of a lurid, stirring fiction story! I rode after cattle daily, scouring the open mountain range miles from any town or even from the scattered homestead ranches.

"The cattle run wild all winter. Many of them succeed in escaping roundups for years. Then they seem to become outlaws, really *bad!* Five of us risked our skins in roping one snorting old granddaddy of the range. We tied him to a tree, hoping to gentle him sufficiently to

warrant driving. By mid-afternoon he was dead—had hanged himself fighting the rope and the other cattle that crowded around in curiosity."

"MAVERICKS"

A DIFFERENCE of opinion exists concerning the derivation of this commonly-used term for unbranded cattle, even among ranchers and old-time punchers of the Southwest. A reader of **SHORT STORIES** writes from the **TEX** ranch, Valiant, Oklahoma.

Editor, **SHORT STORIES**,
Dear Sir:

I have heard several explanations of the term "maverick." My grandfather came to Texas from Tennessee in the 30's and he has given me a lot of Lone Star lore one time and another. My impression is that Maverick was a man who turned loose, down about San Antonio way, a herd of cattle and left them without a caretaker. Other cowmen got into the habit of branding his calves in the Maverick brand, so in course of time he had numerous cattle which scattered his brand farther and farther until his herds roamed over most of central and north Texas. After a while, when a cowman found an unbranded brute he naturally supposed it to belong to the Maverick herd; as all other men saw after the branding of their own. Everybody helped Maverick. Texas soon was overrun with cattle with Maverick's brand and there is no telling how many thousands he then possessed.

MATTHEW WATSON.

FROM the following, which appeared first in the *St. Louis Republic*, November, 1889, it would seem that an unintentional wrong is done a splendid Texan family through the popular tradition based largely upon a misconception.

It is asserted in substance that the patriarch of the Maverick family came at an early day from Ireland to Texas, became a stock raiser, and branded all the yearling calves he found un-

branded on the range; such animals became known as "Mavericks," implying, of course, that such branding was done regardless of rightful ownership. Allow me to correct this statement.

Nearly 100 years ago this branch of the Maverick family removed from Massachusetts to South Carolina, and in 1835 Samuel A. Maverick, a native of the latter state came to Texas. He signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, and many times served in both branches of the Legislature, in which I was repeatedly his colleague. A more honorable man never sat in our councils. He was a noble man, and the head of a noble family. He acquired much land and also many cattle, but paid no attention to the latter, or so little that they scattered over a large scope of country. In time this became so notorious that in their spring round-ups, the people on that frontier came to regard all yearlings found with Maverick's cattle as legitimate prey, facetiously styling every unbranded yearling so found a "maverick," and appropriating it as such. In this way his herd, in a few years, virtually became extinct. In all this time, indeed from 1837 till his death a few years ago, Mr. Maverick lived in San Antonio, while his cattle, as before stated, were at large on the frontier. Instead of grasping the stock of other people, by sheer neglect and indifference Mr. Maverick allowed other people to appropriate his own young cattle till his herd ceased to be.

I have not seen a member of the family since 1861, but know these statements to be true, and am unwilling to remain silent when the memory of so true and good a man is thus placed in a false light.

JOHN HENRY BROWN,
Dallas, Texas.

JUDGING that in the settling of a question involving the name of a family, some member of the Maverick clan had a right to be heard, we have obtained the following statement from the grandson of the original Samuel A. Maverick.

Hon. Samuel A. Maverick, a citizen of San Antonio, was, during 1845, residing temporarily at Decrow's Point, on Matagorda Bay. He was a lawyer with a strong propensity for investment is real estate. In fact, all the enterprising men in Texas of that day were justly enthusiastic over real estate at 5 and 10 cents an acre.

During the year 1845 a neighbor, being indebted to Mr. Maverick in the sum of \$1,200 paid the debt in cattle, transferring 400 animals at \$3 a head. Steers were cheap in those days, the hides only being cashable in foreign markets. Mr. Maverick did not want stock, but as it was a case of cattle or nothing, he passively received them and left them in charge of a colored family, nominally slave, but essentially free; while he and his own kin returned to San Antonio.

In the year 1853 the cattle were removed from the Gulf coast to Conquista, on the east bank of the San Antonio River, 50 miles below San Antonio. Here, as before, under the distinguished (?) management of the colored family, who really were not to blame, as they had no interest in the outcome, the cattle were left to graze, to fatten, to multiply, and to wander away.

About one-third of the calves were branded, and the stencil iron was kept so cold and rusty that in 1856 the entire herd was estimated at 400 head, the original number!

Neighbors shrewdly surmised the stray calves

to be Maverick's, and so they called them "mavericks"—but did they continue to recognize them as such? Ah, no; they hastened to burn into the tender hides far different brands, and the beasts were Maverick's (mavericks) no longer.

About the year 1856, after 11 years of experience in the cattle business Mr. Maverick sold the entire brand, 400 head, "as they ran" to Mr. A. Toutant Beauregard, a brother of the distinguished General Beauregard. Mr. Beauregard, however, paid \$6 per head, and Mr. Maverick retired from the venture with an apparent profit of 700 per cent and the unique distinction of having his name bestowed upon a very useful critter known to every cowman. Mr. Maverick, all statements to the contrary notwithstanding, was never a range king, for, with the exception of the herd mentioned and a few necessary cow ponies, he never owned any cattle or horses.

GEORGE M. MAVERICK.

QUICKER EVEN THAN A "LIGHTNING DRAW"

C. K. RICHARD, of Hermon, Illinois, inquired recently concerning an implement of range and border equipment appearing occasionally in our stories; the "half-breed holster" for a six-gun. Since other members of the Circle may have been puzzled by the reference, it is well to make plain the nature of this contrivance, which is used commonly in Mexico. A half-breed holster is an ordinary six-gun sheath, flapless and with the lower end cut away for a distance of two or three inches to facilitate sudden firing from the holster. In this action the holster, with the gun barrel protruding from its lower end (often a bored cork just fitting the muzzle is sewed to the leather) is tipped to horizontal as the six-gun trigger is pulled or the hammer fanned.

COWS ON THE TRACK AHEAD

IN THE next issue we begin a new cattle country serial by George Washington Ogden, and old timers are going to have many a chuckle at doings in the town of McPacken, typical cowtown of an easily recognizable period in the development of the West. The story opens with the long lines of cattle trains moving their bawling loads to fatten on Kansas ranges and the current report that "both are wild—men and cattle." From then on you can't help being interested in the adventures of the Texan, Tom Laylander, who would "wade through a river of wildcats," and who found in McPacken several things in the way of adventures he had by no means expected.

There is also a Charles Tenney Jackson story of a port of exiles, "The Fadeout," a thrilling J. Allan Dunn novel, "The Trouble at Tres Pinos," as well as stories by

Harold Lamb, Thomson Burtis, L. De Bra, and Ethel Watts Mumford.

THE MAIL BAG

IF MAGAZINES, like men, are to be known by the company they keep, this letter pleases us too greatly to be held a secret.

Editor, *SHORT STORIES*,
Dear Sir:

I am proud to say that I have never come across anything to equal *SHORT STORIES*. It is a real he-man's magazine; and you can be congratulated for giving something worth while to the public. Its stories are clean, wholesome, true to life and especially interesting to a sea-going man.

I am a sailor on the U. S. S. *Langley*, only aircraft carrier of the U. S. Navy; and I am also a veteran of the World War, having served in the "Fighting Sixteenth" in six major operations, traveled through twenty-eight countries in this man's world and I must say that I have found *SHORT STORIES* ready to cheer me up everywhere I roamed.

I have visited several places mentioned in *SHORT STORIES* and enjoyed them a great deal more than if I had never read of them. Most men of the Navy read *SHORT STORIES* and I have heard nothing but praise. There is little suits me better than to be at sea on a calm day and go out on deck and read *SHORT STORIES*.

More luck to you in your good work and I assure you that you have won a "shipmate" who will always boost *SHORT STORIES*.

ROBERT E. METCALFE, SK2C,
U. S. S. *Langley*,
Naval Air Station,
Pensacola, Florida.

And while the following, written by another friend and well-wisher of the magazine, is a horse of entirely different color, the letter contains criticism of a policy we always are glad to leave in the hands of

the majority. The purpose of the Readers' Choice Coupon at the end of this section is to keep us of the editorial office informed closely concerning the likes and dislikes of our readers.

Editor, *SHORT STORIES*,
Dear Sir:

But you the drinks Western stories are not as universally popular as you think! You get lots of letters from enthusiastic readers who heartily enjoy that kind; but not many, I think, expressing soulfelt weariness of them. Nevertheless there are more of the latter type of letter-writers than you may imagine. My letter is inspired by a reporter's comment in this evening's paper about the popularity of Western shows in the lower Main Street picture houses. Business always is good when Bill Hart et al are on the screen. But, he adds, and you can draw a line under the "but"—the houses higher uptown refuse to run a Western under any circumstances! And I know they are nearly always S. R. O.

No one who dislikes Westerns, ever goes to the box office and tells the manager so. He merely drifts uptown in search of Harold Lloyd or Dorothy Gish. And when he goes to the newsstand he doesn't cuss the dealer for selling Western stories—simply buys another magazine.

This is not a spiteful missive from an enemy. You are giving us the very best, better than most of the others, and your avoidance of long-drawn-out serials fills me with gratitude. I have been a reader for a long time and intend to remain one.

LASHIRE WADE,
304½ W. Exchange, Fort Worth, Texas.

THE three judges of "The Desert's Price" letter contest now are weighing the relative merits of a few 100-word descriptions which survived earlier siftings. The decision will be announced in these columns in an early issue, and a check for the prize amount mailed to the winner.

DON'T FORGET THE COUPON! CUT IT OUT TODAY AND LET US KNOW YOUR OPINION OF THE STORIES IN THIS NUMBER

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, *SHORT STORIES*:

Garden City, N. Y.

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(Extract from a letter of Mrs. Hugo V. Bolin of Ponca City, Oklahoma)



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(Extract from letter of Mr. F. A. Christopherson of Fresno, Calif.)



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(Extract from letter of Mrs. Mary H. Lloyd of New Albany, Ind.)

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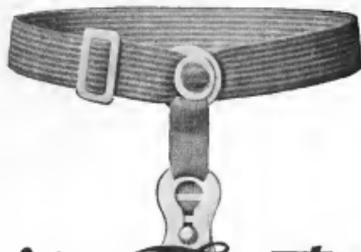


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